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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Parshat Masei

A Map of the Soul

“These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who went out of the land of Egypt...” (33:1)

The Torah is not a history book. It is a guide to the inner structure of physical reality — and of the soul.

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that the 42 journeys in the Torah portion of Masei are not only the historical journeys of the Jewish People in the wilderness, but also a spiritual map of each individual’s life. From birth — symbolized by Egypt — to the final journey into the World to Come, each of us goes through our own 42 stations. Sometimes we’re climbing; sometimes we’re stuck. Sometimes it feels like we are going backwards. But every stop is part of the plan.

The Torah uses the phrase “These are the journeys” — not “these are the encampments” to emphasize that essence of life is movement, not the resting. We are not defined by where we paused, but by how we moved forward afterward.

Life is a journey, and growth only happens in motion.

These journeys were dictated “by the word of Hashem.” The Divine Presence guides each of our steps — even the detours, even the failures. Every stage has its purpose. There is no such thing as being “off the path,” provided that we allow the journey to bring us closer to Hashem.

Perhaps that's why the Torah lists even the seemingly "negative" places — the complaints, the rebellions. Because in truth, those low points are also milestones of growth. Teshuva, return, is always available — and often our deepest spiritual development comes precisely in those difficult encampments.

The Torah portion of Masei reminds us: We are each on a journey — unique, winding, and often mysterious. But with emunah, with faith, we can trust that every step — from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael — is a part of a Divine choreography leading us from our beginnings toward our ultimate destination.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Matot

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

Masei

The Torah names all 42 encampments of the Bnei Yisrael on their 40-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan River into Eretz Yisrael. Hashem commands the Bnei Yisrael to drive out the Canaanites from the Land of Israel and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. The Bnei Yisrael are warned that if they fail to completely rid the Land of the Canaanites, those who remain will be “pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides.” The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the Levites, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established so that someone who unintentionally kills another person may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their own tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of Bamidbar/Numbers, the fourth of the Books of the Torah.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Masechet Avodah Zarah 30-36

Fragrant Oil

Rav Nachman the son of Rav Chisda taught: “Why is a Torah scholar compared to a flask of fragrant oil? To teach that when he is open, his good fragrance is sensed, but when he is closed, his good fragrance is not sensed.”

This idea is learned from a verse in Song of Songs (1:3), which also teaches other inspirational messages. Rashi on our daf explains this statement to mean that only when a Torah scholar actually teaches what he has learned to others does he acquire a special name. Just as the oil’s good fragrance is amplified when it is poured from its flask into another vessel, so too does the greatness of the Torah scholar increase when he teaches Torah to students.

Another teaching made by this Sage from this verse: “Things that are hidden from him become revealed.” Rashi says this means that when he teaches others, he has special help from Heaven to understand things that he did not understand before, and even without undue effort. The Maharsha explains this teaching somewhat differently. He writes that a Torah scholar will increase his own Torah wisdom when he interacts with his students. As Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Chanina said (Maccot 10a), “Much have I learned from my rabbis, even more have I learned from my colleagues, but from my students have learned more than from anyone else.” When teaching Torah, the teacher achieves his maximum understanding, due to the process of intense questioning from the students, and their joint reasoning consisting of the various logical viewpoints of his students.

Tosefot explains that the idea of “hidden things will be revealed to him” does not refer to increased Torah knowledge as Rashi and the Maharsha claim. Tosefot interprets this statement to mean that “people will tell him their secrets.” People do so because they feel he will correctly advise them how to succeed, due to his great wisdom gained via Torah study. This attribute of becoming “master of advice” is found in Pirkei Avot (6:1): From him (one who studies Torah without ulterior motive) people enjoy counsel and wisdom, understanding and power.

- Avoda Zara 35b

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Parshat Masei

Questions

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

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

Answers

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

Q & A

Parshat Matot

Questions

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

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

Answers

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

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KRIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH (PART 21)

“The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more.”

Wilson Mizener – American Playwright

Kriat Shema al Hamitah continues: “May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you. May Hashem lift up His face toward you and establish peace for you.” (Bamidbar 6:24-26)

These three verses comprise the blessing that the Kohanim bestow upon us. In Israel the Kohanim bless the congregation every day. Outside of Israel there are differing customs as to when Birkat Kohanim is recited. Some Sephardic communities have Birkat Kohanim every day. Others have it on Shabbat but not during the week. The Ashkenazic and Chassidic communities only have Birkat Kohanim on Yom Tov. Whether every day or only on occasion, it is clear that these verses contain every blessing that a person could possibly want because these are the blessings that Hashem chooses to bless us with through the Kohanim.

What do they contain that makes them so precious? The Rabbis teach that the first blessing is a blessing for material success and the second blessing is for spiritual success. If so, what is there left to be blessed with? If we have been blessed with material and spiritual accomplishments what is lacking that could possibly require another blessing? The third blessing contains, perhaps, the most important ingredient of all for success. It is the blessing for the insight needed to blend the blessings of materialism and spirituality together. Because the blessings of material wealth and success without their being grounded in the spiritual realms are worthless. It is only when we take our wealth and use it to enhance Hashem’s Majesty in this world that material success takes on an eternal importance. It is hard to do. But the spiritual rewards are infinite. And similarly, spiritual blessings that are not grounded in the physical world are lacking.

That is why there is a beautifully poignant custom that many parents have to bless their children on Friday night at the Shabbat table. On the most exalted day of the week, as we envelop ourselves in the sanctity and the grandeur of Shabbat, we bless our children that they should be the recipients of all three blessings. They incorporate every single thing a Jewish parent could possibly want for their

children. Even though more than thirty years have passed, I can still feel my father's hands on my head as he blessed me, and the incredible sense of feeling cherished it gave me. And, in the same way, every week I bless my children and grandchildren trying to convey to them the same sense of endless parental love that I felt. And, in turn, my children continue the chain and bless their children.

For me, personally, these blessings have immeasurable worth because they are my lifeline to eternity.

My grandfather was one of thirteen siblings. They were all raised more or less the same way in a very religious home. And, yet, in my generation, from all the grandchildren of the original thirteen siblings, there are only twelve grandchildren who are religious. And they are all my grandfather's grandchildren. Not one of his siblings merited to have religious grandchildren. How did that happen? What was the "secret ingredient" that my grandfather had that his siblings didn't seem to have? I have no doubts whatsoever as to what it was that kept us all spiritually safe and sound. Every single time that we went to visit my grandfather, when it was time to leave, he would place both of his hands on our heads and bless us with these blessings.

And, by doing so, he bound us, not just to him, but to all of the generations that came before him. Because these blessings are more than "just" words. They are life.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Matos-Masei: The Wormy Place

"Know from whence you came, to where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give an accounting." These are the famous words of Akavya ben Mahalalel as recorded in the Mishnah, and, in some circles these words are recited at every funeral. As the Mishnah explains, the answers to the questions are: One comes from a putrid drop, one is going to a dusty place of rimah and toleah, and one is destined to present an accounting of their life's deeds before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He (Avot 3:1). In this essay we focus on the words rimah and toleah — which are both associated with "worms" — in order to differentiate between these two apparent synonyms.

The morbid fact that all men are destined to arrive at a place of "rimah and toleah" is mentioned several times in the Talmud. In one instance, this fact is mentioned in a supplication that one sage recommended saying if one had to flatulate in the middle of reciting the prayers (Brachot 24b). In another case, a good-looking man convinced himself not to go out and sin by reminding himself that his physical body is destined to rot and decompose while turning into rimah and toleah (Nedarim 9b). In a third passage, the Talmud (Bava Batra 17a) states that there were seven righteous people whose post-mortem bodies were not subject to rimah and toleah: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aharon, Miriam, and Benjamin. Finally, in another instance, the Talmud relates that Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, said about himself that his innards will not be subject to rimah and toleah after his death (Bava Metzia 83b). In all of these cases, the words rimah and toleah appear together as a tandem, just as they do in the Mishnah that we cited in the beginning of this essay. The phrase is also used in the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah §20, Vayikra Rabbah §18, Devarim Rabbah §11, and Kohelet Rabbah §5, 12), but curiously it never appears in the Talmud Yerushalmi.

Let's unpack the phrase "rimah and toleah" by looking at each word separately, and then looking at how they are used together. The word rimah appears seven times in the Bible, five of which occur in the Book of Iyov (7:5, 17:14, 21:26, 24:20, 25:6) and two of which occur elsewhere (Ex. 16:24, Isa. 14:11). Of those final two cases, one refers to the fact that the manna left from Friday to Shabbat did not become infested — "and there was no rimah in it" (Ex. 16:24). This stands in stark contrast to what the Torah reported a few verses earlier that manna left over from previous days to the next became infested with worms, using the verb form of vayarum (an inflection of rimah) to denote "infestation," and the noun tolaim to denote "worms" (Ex. 16:20).

Among the classical Hebrew lexicographers, Ibn Janach and Radak in their respective Sefer HaShorashim write that the word rimah derives from the triliteral root REISH-MEM-MEM. The same is understood by Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Parchon in his Machberet HeAruch. However, Menachem Ibn Saruk in Machberet Menachem writes that rimah actually comes from the biliteral root REISH-MEM. Either way, the semantic range of words deriving from either of those two roots — as well as the root REISH-VAV-MEM — include "lifting," "exalting," "separating," "removing," "producing," and "throwing."

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (in both Yeriot Shlomo and Cheshek Shlomo) expands on Ibn Saruk's understanding that rimah derives from REISH-MEM by specifically connecting "worms" to the "throwing" meaning of that root. The way he explains it, the sort of "throwing" denoted by this root is when one throws something upwards in such a way that the object will travel in a semi-circle formation as when it reaches its peak, it will freefall downwards adding gravity and its own weight to the force of the impact. This is the theory behind ballistic missiles. In the case of rimah, these "worms" do not have legs that they can use to jump, but instead they gather up their inner fortitude to "throw" themselves and form an arc as they land on their intended spot. Interestingly, when discussing the word rimah and its etymological basis, Rabbi Pappenheim suggests that perhaps the word rimmon ("pomegranate") derives from rimah because that fruit is highly susceptible to worm infestation.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 16:20) writes that when an inanimate item (like food) is left on the ground, it appears lifeless. But if that item then becomes infested with worms that are moving about on top of it, it suddenly appears alive, as though the item had been "lifted" from its state of lifelessness into a state of animation. He uses this optical illusion in the eye of one who sees something infested with worms to explain the connection between the word rimah and the "lifting" meaning of the roots mentioned earlier. As an aside, Rabbi Hirsch stresses that his explanation is based on how worm-infestation appears to the naked eye, but has no bearing on the etiological question of whether such worms are created by spontaneous generation or are born of eggs (which was a controversial issue in his time).

Alternatively, we could account for the etymology of rimah by noting that when worms swarm upon something rotting, they "ascend" upon the item in question as though "lifted up" on top of it (such an explanation is somewhat implied by the Malbim in Sefer HaCarmel).

Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Carpentras in Aholei Yehuda offers two more theories as to the etymology of rimah: First, he argues (in line with the science of his times) that "worms" are generated by excess fat when a rotting food item becomes hot and putrid. According to this, he sees the root REISH-MEM-MEM mentioned by the lexicographers as somehow related to the three-letter root CHET-MEM-MEM, but he does not explain how the letters REISH and CHET might be interchangeable. Secondly, he sees rimah as related to the "lifting" meaning of the aforementioned roots, arguing that a worm is such a small and insignificant creature that its body barely appears to "lift" off the ground.

Rabbi David Chaim Chelouch (Michtam L'David Luach HaShorashim to Ps. 24:4 and Ohr Chadash Luach HaShorashim to Ex. 16:20) takes a different approach. He understands that in many roots in the Hebrew language, the meanings derived from a single root can refer to one thing and its polar opposite. This is because such exact opposites are always thematically related (in an inverse relationship), and thus could be semantically/etymologically-related. In line with this thinking, he writes that REISH-MEM can refer to something objectively “uplifted” and “exalted” (ram) or to its complete opposite — the lowest of the low (rimah, a “worm”). He also notes that this root can refer to something in between, like mirmah (“trickery”) or ramai (“trickster”) which give off the impression of being wise and exalted, but are really the opposite.

We will return to the word rimah later, but for now, let us segue to the other Biblical Hebrew word for “worm.” The word toleah only appears twice in Biblical Hebrew (Isa. 14:11, Job 25:6), as does its alternate form tola (Lam. 4:5, Isa. 1:18). But their close relative tola’at occurs close to forty times throughout the Bible. In one case, the Jewish people are called a tola’at: Hashem reassures the Jews in exile by saying “do not fear, O Worm of Jacob [tola’at Yaakov]” (Isa. 41:14). As Radak explains, the exiled Jews are compared to a worm because of their weakened state and flimsy circumstances. But the Midrash (Tanchuma Beshalach §9) offers another explanation, stating that just as a lowly worm can fell a mighty cedar with its mouth, so can the Jewish People fell great nations with just their mouth (i.e., through the power of prayer). Tola also appears in the Bible as a given name, borne by a son of Jacob’s son Issachar (Gen. 46:13, Num. 26:23, I Chron. 7:1-2) and by a later judge from the Isaacharite tribe (Judges 10:1).

All the early lexicographers (Ibn Saruk, Ibn Janach, Radak, and Ibn Parchon) trace the word toleah to the trilateral root TAV-LAMMED-AYIN. That root also yields the Biblical Hebrew word mitalot (Job 29:17, Joel 1:6, and Prov. 30:14), which means “teeth.” The connection between “worms” and “teeth” is not insignificant, as we have already cited that the rabbis in the Midrash see the worm’s “mouth” (i.e., capacity for consumption) as its most outstanding feature. Indeed, Midrash Sechel Tov (to Ex. 16:24) explains the difference between rimah and toleah by noting that rimah do not eat or drink, while toleah eat as though they were creatures with teeth.

Rabbi Pappenheim takes the etymology of toleah in a slightly different direction, arguing that in both toleah and mitalot, the TAV is extraneous to the core root,

which he sees as simply LAMMED-AYIN — defined as “the organ of swallowing.” In fact, the word *loa* (LAMMED-AYIN) appears once in the Bible in sense of “throat” (Prov. 23:2), and Rabbi Pappenheim sees *mitalot* as related because “teeth” are also integral to the digestive system and work together with one’s throat to help process food. Rabbi Pappenheim even views the verb *bala* (“swallowing”) as related to this two-letter root, parsing the trilateral BET-LAMMED-AYIN as a portmanteau of BET-ALEPH (“coming/entering”) and LAMMED-AYIN. Of course, the act of “swallowing” is simply the act of causing food to “enter” the “throat,” so it all fits together. Following this understanding, Rabbi Pappenheim further argues that the word *toleah* also derives from this biliteral root because “worms” consume their food quite quickly, as though simply “swallowing” without chewing.

Before we move on to exploring the possible differences between *rimah* and *toleah*, I wanted to once again indulge my predilection for onomastics by focusing on the given name *Tola*. In offering an exegetical basis for this rather bizarre name, Midrash Sechel Tov (to Gen. 46:13) writes that this name is associated with the Tribe of Issachar, a tribe otherwise known for its outstanding Torah Study (see I Chron. 12:33). Accordingly, the name *Tola* is explained as a reference to the fact that its bearer would bask in the study of Torah, like a worm who consumes Torah content (similar to the English idiom “book worm”). A similar Midrash says about the family of *Tola* (Yalkut Midrashei Teiman to Num. 26:23) that just as a worm penetrates a fruit in order to infest it, so too did the *Tolaites* enter deep into the depths of Halacha when studying Torah. Alfred Jones in *The Proper Names of the Old Testament Scriptures Expounded and Illustrated* (London, 1856), p. 360 conjectures that Issachar’s son was called *Tola* “because of his poor, weak, and scarlet [related to *tola’at shani*, “red”] appearance when he was born.”

Now that we have explored *rimah* and *toleah* to familiarize ourselves with how they are used in the Bible and what their etymological bases might be, it is time to discuss what the difference between these two apparent synonyms might be. If both words refer to “worms,” then why are they two different words?

Rabbi Shaul Goldman explains that *rimah* refers specifically to larvae/maggots but not actual worms. In the broader sense, it always refers to internal decay and decomposition. By contrast, he argues that *toleah* refers to worms as creatures that consume grub/food — an external force of destruction that feasts upon whatever is being broken down. As mentioned earlier, many commentators connect the word *toleah* to the words for “throat” and “teeth,” and this relates to

the core implication of toleah as such. As we will see below, there are several sources that may be adduced to support Rabbi Goldman's assertion.

Our first data point is the word-order in the Bible. In verses wherein rimah and toleah appear as a tandem, the word rimah always precedes the word toleah (isa. 4:11, Job 25:6), just like in the rabbinic phrase "rimah and toleah." This implies that rimah chronologically precedes toleah, so rimah can refer to unborn worms, while toleah refers to a later stage.

Indeed, that very point is made by some very important rabbinic authorities: Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, also known as the Netziv, writes in his work *Birkat HaNetziv* (to *Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishmael* on Ex. 16:20, see also *Ha'Emek Sheilah* §56:3) that rimah refers to smaller worms that begin to appear on something before it starts to rot, while toleah refers to longer creepy, crawling worms that infest rotten things after it has already spoiled. For this reason, when discussing the manna going bad after the day is over, the Torah first uses a verbal inflection of rimah (*vayarum*), and only afterwards mentions the plural form of the noun toleah. From this, we see that rimah implies a less mature worm than toleah does.

A similar explanation is cited by Rabbi Binyamin Rivlin (*Giviyay Giviya HaKesef* to Ex. 16:20) in the name of the Vilna Gaon. He writes that infestation usually begins with small worms (rimah) and then devolves into larger worms (toleah), such that when the Torah said that the manna from Friday left over for Shabbat did not become wormy, it specifically uses the term rimah (Ex. 16:24) to stress that the manna did not even reach the first stage of infestation and, a priori, it did not reach the second, more-advanced stage (which would have been represented by the word toleah). Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (in *Beiurei Shemot Nirdafim*) finds support for the Vilna Gaon's explanation of the words of Rashbam (to Ex. 16:20).

In a similar vein, Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi-Ashkenazi (*Otzar Nirdafim* §482) writes that rimah refers to early-stage infestation when the maggots are still larvae in their eggs. He clarifies that although the word rimah seems like it is in singular form, it actually refers to a cluster of such larvae, not just a single egg. By contrast, he explains that toleah — which is in singular form — refers to a single fully-formed "worm" that has already grown up and takes on a life of its own.

Alternatively, Rabbi Tedeschi-Ashkenazi explains that rimah refers to the small worms that can be found in fruits and cheese, while toleah refers to the sorts of worms that can be found in the intestinal innards of a human or animal, or buried in the ground. Rabbi Wertheimer similarly infers from the Mishnah (Avot 2:7) that rimah specially infests fatty flesh.

Turning to some etymological speculation, Rabbi Tedeschi-Ashkenazi suggests that rimah is related to the root REISH-BET (via the interchangeability of MEM and BET), which refers to the “multiplication” and “proliferation/spawning” (rav/harbeh/ribui) of larvae that occurs with the onset of infestation. He further suggests the word toleah relates to loa (“throat”) because a worm’s form resembles the long tubular shape of a person’s “throat.”

Rabbi Hirsch (to Ex. 16:20) offers another difference between rimah and toleah: Whilst rimah form from within the rotting item (or at least appear to do so), toleah refers to worms that (clearly) come from the outside in order to consume the rotting food. He too writes that because toleah is characterized by its “consumption” or “eating,” the very word toleah etymologically relates to the loa (“throat”), a body part integral for eating.

The Malbim (to Isa. 4:11) explains the difference between rimah and toleah by noting that rimah refer to when the larvae/maggots have not left their place of generation, while toleah refers to a worm that can already ambulate and move around. Elsewhere, Malbim (Yair Ohr when discussing the difference between the words adam and enosh) writes that rimah refers to worms that infest something rotting, while toleah refers to worms per se.

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

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

MAKING AND ANNULING VOWS

Mitzvah #406-407; Bamidbar ch. 30:2-17

Just as Hashem sanctified Shabbos out of the seven days of the week, He sanctified the mouth out of the head's seven openings (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and one mouth). He granted it to man only so that he would be able to speak His praise, which is one of the primary reasons for Creation (Chidah to Bereishis 2:1). The mouth can create a new existence with mere words; indeed, Hashem created the entire universe with mere words. Therefore, a vow that emerges from the mouth has great significance, and treating it lightly has grave consequences and is also inherently sacrilegious (Chinuch §30 and Metzudas David §214).

Even so, we find that our ancestors resorted to making vows at times of distress. When Yaakov fled from Eisav, he vowed that if Hashem would provide for him and return him to his land in peace, he would tithe all that he would receive and serve Him on the altar that he then erected (Bereishis 28:22). Apparently, if he would have just intended to do so or said that he would try to do so, he may not have merited the Divine assistance that he did. Similarly, when the Jewish people went out to war against the Amalekites in Parashas Chukas (21:1), they vowed to consecrate any cities they would conquer to Hashem. We also find examples of our ancestors resorting to making a vow to compel them to increase their service of Hashem (see Tehillim 119:106).

However, it is only the practice of great people to make vows. Only they know when it is necessary and that they will succeed in keeping it. Accordingly, whenever a person makes a vow, the Heavenly Court examines his accounts to see if he is as righteous as he makes himself out to be, and this can bring judgment upon him (Nedarim 22a, cited in Otzar HaMidrashim). The Sages compare making a vow with good intentions to building a bamah altar, which is

similarly a forbidden act with good intentions (Ran to ibid.). Therefore, a person should avoid making vows altogether, as the wise King Shlomo advised: Better not make a vow than to make a vow and not pay (Koheles 5:4). Whenever a person says that he will give charity or perform a mitzvah, it is advisable to say bli neder (without a vow). So too, when a person does a good deed with the intention of adopting it as a custom, or if he does it three times even without such an intention, he should say bli neder.

If a woman vows in a matter that concerns her husband, he has the right to undo it on the day that he hears about it. This is because the wife certainly did not intend to make a vow to which her husband would object (Rabbeinu Bechaye) and because a husband and wife are like one entity (Rabbeinu Menachem HaBavli). A father has a similar right concerning the vows of a minor daughter, who likewise would not have intended to make a vow had she known that her father would object.

Under certain conditions, a group of three men can annul a person's vow on the grounds that he did not make the vow knowing that circumstances would change and he would not be able to keep it, or on similar grounds. The Torah does not mention this possibility explicitly so that people will not take vows lightly.

INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

5785 – The Rarest Year of Them All

Part XIII: Handling Haftaros

As detailed in previous installments in our series, our current year, 5785, is not only a rare one, but calendarically speaking, actually the hands-down rarest of them all. 5785 is classified as a HaSh"A year in our calendars. This abbreviation is referring to Rosh Hashana falling out on Thursday (hei), both months of Cheshvan and Kislev being shalem (shin - 30 day months instead of possibly 29; these are the only months that can switch off in our set calendar), and Pesach falling out on Sunday (**aleph**).

A HaSh"A year is the rarest of years, and out of the 14 possibilities in Tur's 247-year calendar cycle, this year type occurs on average only once in about 30.19

years (approximately 3.3 percent of the time). Indeed, at times there are 71 years (!) in between HaSh”A years. The last time this year type occurred was 31 years ago in 5754/1994. The next time will be 20 years hence in 5805/2044. The next several times after that are slated to be 27 years further, in 5832/2071 and then a 51 year gap in 5883/2122.

The reasons and rules governing the whys and whens this transpires are too complicated for this discussion; suffice to say that when the Mishnah Berurah discusses these issues he writes “ain kan makom l’ha’arich,” that this is not the place to expound in detail, which is certainly good enough for this author.

Obviously, such a rare calendar year will contain many rare occurrences. This series details many of them. Let’s continue on our journey through our unique year.

Delayed Shabbos-Rosh Chodesh Haftara?

The first Shabbos Rosh Chodesh of 5785 was Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan, Parashas Noach – in which the haftarah for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh “Hashamayim Kisi” (Yeshaya Ch.66:1) was leined. However, although there are and will be several more Shabbosei Rosh Chodesh over the course of this year, nonetheless, this special haftarah will not be leined for another year and a half from its previous reading right after Sukkos. The second Shabbos Rosh Chodesh this year was Rosh Chodesh Adar, which also was Parashas Shekalim, which as one of the Arba Parshiyos, knocked off any other haftarah. Yet, the third occurrence of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, the upcoming Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av, is when it gets interesting.

As we know, most haftaros share some similarity with at least one concept presented in the Torah reading. The Gemara Megillah discusses the proper haftarah readings for the various holidays throughout the year. The Gemara (Megillah 29b-31a) states that whenever Rosh Chodesh falls out on Shabbos, the special haftarah of “Hashamayim Kisi,” is read, as it mentions both the inyanim of Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh.

Head-To-Head Haftaros

Our dilemma arises when that rule goes head-to-head with another rule. The Pesikta, (an early Midrash cited by many early authorities) continues the teachings of Chazal as to the proper haftarah readings starting from the Fast of Shiva Assur B'Tamuz.

“During the ‘Three Weeks’ from 17 Tamuz until Tisha B’Av, we read ‘T’lasa D’Paranusa,’ ‘Three Readings of Misfortune.’ After Tisha B’Av (starting with Shabbos Nachamu, dubbed so due to its haftarah, Nachamu Nachamu Ami) until Rosh Hashana, ‘Shiva D’Nechemta’, or ‘Seven Readings of Consolation’ are read. This is followed by a reading of Teshuva, during the Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, aptly named ‘Shabbos Shuva,’ for its repentance themed haftarah starting with ‘Shuva Yisrael.’”

The Abudraham as well as Rabbeinu Tam, conclude that these special haftarah readings are so important, that they are never pushed off!

The \$64,000 question becomes, what happens when Rosh Chodesh Av falls out on Shabbos? Which ruling trumps which? Do we follow the Gemara or the Pesikta? Do we stick with the ‘T’lasa D’Paranusa’ or the special Rosh Chodesh reading?

The answer is that there is no easy answer! The Beis Yosef (O.C. 425:1 s.v. umashekasav) writes that the ikar halacha follows the Abudraham as he was considered the expert in these topics. Consequently, in the Shulchan Aruch, he only mentions that during the “Three Weeks” the ‘T’lasa D’Paranusa’ are read. Hence on Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av, the Sefardic minhag is to only read the regularly scheduled haftarah of “Misfortune”: “Shimu,” (Yirmiyahu Ch. 2:4; along with the first and last pasuk of Hashamayim Kisi).

Prague vs. Posen

Yet, figuring out the Ashkenazic minhag is not so simple. Aside from this being a divergence of minhag between the cities of Prague and Posen, as well as a machlokes Rishonim, it is also a machlokes of Tosafos in different Masechtos. And although several Poskim conclude that whichever of the two haftaros is read is fine, nevertheless, the majority consensus seems to be that the minhag to read “Shimu” is the most prevalent, following the Mishnah Berurah’s (425:8) citing of the Vilna Gaon’s position as the final word on the matter. Although in other year make-ups Sefardic and Ashkenazic minhag diverge on this point, nonetheless, on a practical level, this year, they concur.

Accordingly, to most of the world, the special Shabbos Rosh Chodesh haftarah of “Hashamayim Kisi” will not be read from the beginning of 5785 all the way until Parashas Tazria-Metzora, Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5786 - eighteen months later. [This is due to the next Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Teves 5786 being on Chanuka, so Chanuka’s haftarah trumps it due to Pirsumei Nissa (publicizing the Chanuka miracle); hence, for most of Klal Yisrael, ‘Hashamayim Kisi’ will practically not be leined until Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5786.]

Similar will occur this year regarding “Machar Chodesh,” the special haftarah ordinarily read on Shabbos directly preceding a Sunday Rosh Chodesh, which was leined as the haftarah for Parashas Toldos earlier this year, and will not be read again by the majority of Klal Yisrael until Parashas Bamidbar 5786, a year and a half later. [This is due to its being pushed off for Parashas Hachodesh, Shiva D’Nechemta, and two-day Rosh Chodeshes respectively, the next few times that a Sunday Rosh Chodesh will occur over the next year. Hence, it is not until the next Parashas Bamidbar, when “Machar Chodesh” will be read.]

Our fascinating journey detailing the many remarkable facets of our rare year will *iy”H* be continued...

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that “the Jew’s catechism is his calendar.” It is this author’s wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare minhagim, this article will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendarical customs.

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