

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Mattos-Masei

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

ULTRUISTIC MOTIVATION

Rebbe Nachman

“Moshe spoke to the tribal leaders of Bnei Yisrael saying, ‘This is the word that Hashem has commanded...’” (30:2)

All the other prophets prefaced their messages with the phrase “So said G-d,” indicating a general understanding, the perception of something from a distance. But Moshe achieved even more than they, for he also prophesied, “This is the word,” indicating great specificity and clarity. (Rashi)

These two levels of prophecy are comparable to the two ways one can perform mitzvos.

First there is the person who performs mitzvos with the knowledge that he will receive a reward in the World to Come. He has no enjoyment from the mitzvah itself, and if he would not be given the World to Come as a reward, he would not do it. Just like the regular prophet who sees something from a distance, he performs the mitzvos for the reward they will bring him at a distant time, after this world.

Then there is the person who performs the mitzvos with such great joy that he has no desire for any reward in the World to Come. Instead, his only desire is that G-d provide him with the opportunity to do another mitzvah as a reward for the first mitzvah. Just like the clear and immediate prophecy of Moshe, such a person reaps his reward in the here and now. (See Likutey Moharan I, 5:2)

RELIABLE WORDS

Maggid of Kozhnitz

“He shall not profane his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do.” (30:3)

The person who is careful of what he says and makes sure that none of his words are meaningless, of him the verse says, “whatever comes from his mouth shall he do.” That is, Hashem will do as he says. His blessings will be fulfilled, and his words are like edicts to be implemented.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Chasam Sofer

“Moshe spoke to the tribal leaders of Bnei Yisrael saying, ‘This is the word that Hashem has commanded...’” (30:2)

Moshe explained to the Children of Israel that they were to value the words of their leaders. It should be clear that the words of the leaders and Sages also considered “the words that Hashem has commanded.”

PERMITTED PLEASURES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When a man makes an oath to Hashem imposing an obligation upon himself...” (30:3)

The Torah generally allows us to indulge in pleasures that G-d has put in this world for our enjoyment, as long as doing so does not compromise our Divine consciousness (Yerushalmi Kiddushin 4:12; Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:5).

But when we notice that a particular indulgence affects us negatively, we should renounce it - at least temporarily. If we find ourselves incapable of resisting the urge to overindulge, we can make a formal vow, which forbids the indulgence just as if it had been forbidden by the Torah (Avos 3:13). If, on the other hand, we feel that we are capable of controlling ourselves, it is better to abstain from the indulgence without taking a vow.

In either case, we must all be honest with ourselves about which aspects of life we are ready to elevate and which we are not, and to what lengths we must go in order to curb our appetites. (Likutei Torah 3:83b, 84b; Reshimot 51; Likutei Sichot, vol. 33, pp. 186)

By guarding ourselves from things that would be detrimental to our Divine consciousness, we both weaken materialism’s power over us and increase the power of holiness within us. This itself gives us more power to resist negative influences and focus on the spiritual aspects of life’s permitted pleasures. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, p. 1077)
- Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SHARING THE BURDEN

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Moshe spoke to the tribal leaders of Bnei Yisrael saying, “This is the word that Hashem has commanded: When a man makes an oath to Hashem....” (30:2-3)

Moshe addresses the Nesiim when describing the laws of personal vows, the importance of keeping those vows, and the options to annul those vows (30:2-17). Why are the Nesiim being given these laws instead of Moshe’s standard practice of teaching the people directly?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig suggests that personal vows have minimal impact on society; thus, one may conclude that regulating, let alone addressing these vows, should be left to the individual. However, because we are all one people, we have a collective responsibility to help others, sometimes even when they do not ask for it. When someone vows to deny themselves something, that is often a sign that they are not satisfied with themselves, their lives, or situations. Thus, personal vows are societal issues. Leaders must be aware and sensitive in responding to such situations and help those struggling.

Being part of a people makes us more than the sum of our parts, and it is because we care for those around us - not just care as in providing a greater level of attention, but care as in actively concerning ourselves with each other’s struggles.

CREATING ANGELS

The Arizal

“He shall not profane his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do.” (30:3)

The word *yachel* (violate) relates to the word *chalul* - hollow. A person must realize that his words are not empty and hollow, but rather they give rise to a certain spiritual reality.

If one speaks words of Torah and sanctity, he creates sacred angels who intercede on his behalf in the heavens. If, however, one speaks words of frivolity and lightheadedness, not to mention *lashon hara* and gossip, then he creates destructive angels who operate against him, Heaven forbid.

WHAT WOULD HASHEM WANT?

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Moshe spoke to the tribal leaders of Bnei Yisrael saying, “This is the word that Hashem has commanded...” (30:2)

The great Rebbe, Rav Yitzchak of Vorka zt’l, explains that the words spoken by a person (his oath), can create a mitzvah. If a person vows to do something, his words become a command that he is required to fulfill, as if they were an actual mitzvah in the Torah. This demonstrates how important the words of a person are in the eyes of Hashem.

Rav Shmuel Tzvi of Alexander zt’l furthers this concept with an allusion from our pasuk: “This is the word that Hashem has commanded.” Moshe was teaching Klal Yisrael a very important principle: Before a person says or thinks or does anything, he should consider if this is what “Hashem has commanded.” Is this what Hashem wants? Will it bring pleasure to the Creator? Will He be happy with these words or actions? Once a person has thought the matter through, only then can he go forward and say or do what he wants. And if he realizes that perhaps this is not entirely what Hashem desires, then he shouldn’t say or do it.

This is the fulfillment of the words in the pasuk (Devarim 13:8): “After Hashem your G-d, you shall go.” How shall a Jew go? Only after the ways of Hashem. Only by first considering what exactly He would do or want from us, will we then have the formula we need to go forward and prosper in our own lives.

Similarly, Chazal say (Avos 2:1): “Know what is above you.” Always know that everything that one does on this world - even physical needs - must be done like “the One Above” - like Hashem would do. Whether it is words or deeds, our goal is to do “the word that Hashem has commanded.”

ACT FAST

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“When a man makes an oath to Hashem...” (30:3)

Even though the Torah goes into great detail about one who takes an oath, the Gemara understands that it is not a positive thing to do. In fact, the Gemara (Nedarim 22a) calls someone who takes an oath an “evil person!”

The explanation, writes Rav Hirsch, is because Jews pride themselves on growth and knowledge - the more we know, the more we grow! Accordingly, it does not make sense to take an oath today in order to forbid something for ourselves for the future, because we do not have the clarity of mind now to know how we are going to grow later on, perhaps our oath will not be appropriate for us later in life. Therefore, explains Rav Hirsch, if we take an oath and subsequently lock ourselves in to a pattern where we are stuck, we are called evil, because, in essence, we could be stunting our future growth based on a decision made now with a lack of clarity.

The Gemara’s words are difficult to understand in the light of the fact that Yaakov Avinu made an oath to Hashem as he was running away from Esav who was trying to kill him. (Yaakov vows that if Hashem does not abandon him, he will turn the rock where he slept into a place of worship and tithe everything he possesses, including his future son, Levi, whose life would be consecrated to Hashem’s service; Bereishis 28:20-22 with Bereishis Rabbah 70:7). If one is called “evil” for making an oath, how could Yaakov have done it? (In fact, the Medrash calls Yaakov’s oath and others made in a similar situation a mitzvah; Bereishis Rabbah 70:1).

Rav Hirsch answers that whereas it is true that one should not “lock” himself into a lifestyle by prohibiting or permitting things that he may later come to regret; when someone’s life is on the line or he is dealing with a life-altering decision, all trivial matters fall away and his only focus are the important things in life. When someone has this kind of clarity - a true clarity about life’s goals, that is the time to make a life decision binding himself for the future. As such, when Yaakov was fleeing Esav, all trivialities were washed away, and he gained the clarity of mind to act in a certain way, so he took an oath to act how he knew he was supposed to. However, we can ask a further question. If someone in a life-altering situation gains great clarity and is capable of making appropriate decisions for his future, then why does he need to make an oath? Let him just do what he has decided to do! The answer is simple to anyone who has experienced such an enlightening moment of clarity; if we don’t take action immediately, our excitement, inspiration, and drive becomes severely reduced, and in many cases, if we do not immediately act on our moments of inspiration, they will be lost forever along with our chance to truly grow.

To illustrate this point, Rav Frand related that the secretary of Radin Yeshivah once came to the Chofetz Chaim carrying a plain envelope which had been sent through the Polish Postal System (certainly not known for its integrity) containing 500 rubles in cash - a fortune in those days. The Chofetz Chaim instructed his secretary to find out why someone would send 500 rubles through uncertified mail, bearing in mind the great risk that the money would never reach its destination. Within a short time, the secretary had the answer: The donor was a businessman who was trying to make a lucrative business deal. Desperate for it to succeed, the businessman said, “If I get this deal, I’m going to give five hundred rubles to the Chofetz Chaim’s yeshivah.” The man was successful in the deal, and he headed toward the Post Office to fulfill his pledge. But the Post Office was closed so he figured that he would send the money the following day. Then, he heard a little voice inside him saying, “Five hundred rubles? Do you not think the yeshivah would be happy with fifty rubles? Why send them so much? You’re not a millionaire, and you probably would have secured the deal anyway. Just send them fifty rubles!” At that point, explained the businessman, I knew that I had to send the money immediately, because if I would have waited until the next day, the voice inside me would have told me that five rubles would be sufficient. So I immediately stuffed the money into an envelope and sent it to you, because if I would have even waited the time to write a return address, I fear that I would not have had the strength to send you all the money.

Therefore, when we gain a moment of clarity in life, and the right path is clearly in front of us, we need to make an immediate step on to it - even a little one; because, like a flash of lightening on a dark night, the correct path is clearly visible, but we may only have a moment to take our first step.

POWER OF SPEECH

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“He shall not profane his word, but rather ensure that every word which departs one’s mouth must be performed...” (30:3)

Rashi comments that the words *lo yachel d’varo* mean that one should not make their words mundane.

Rav Menachem Mendel of Kossov (Ahavas Shalom) explains that if one is careful to use his or her mouth for holiness and sanctity - “*lo yachel d’varo*,” then every word, every tefillah and every request that one has - “*k’chol ha’yotzei mipiv*,” Hashem will fulfill - “*ya’aseh*.”

The Torah is teaching us an important lesson. If we are careful with our speech, then Hashem will reciprocate by bringing our tefillos to fruition. Let us be mindful of the power of speech, particularly during these three weeks, and hope and daven that Hashem will reward us accordingly!

VOW TO GROW

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Her husband can either uphold or annul any vow or binding oath of self-affliction.” (30:14)

In general, people made vows of abstention from some permitted activity when they felt that this activity was preventing them from leading productive lives, and they felt powerless to resist its temptation without a formal vow. After a period of abstention, they might still feel it necessary to abstain from the activity in question, but would no longer require the crutch of the vow in order to do so. Ideally, they would eventually no longer feel it necessary to abstain at all, having matured to the point that they could engage in the activity without losing control.

Although it is no longer common to make formal vows, there is certainly a place for temporary resolutions of abstinence. The goal, however, should be to eventually be able to restrain ourselves on our own, and later, to mature to the point where the material world no longer poses a threat to our Divine consciousness. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 33, pp. 191-192) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

EXPANDED SENSE OF “I”

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterwards you will be gathered unto your people.” (31:2)

Rashi points out that, despite being told that he would be taken from this world as soon as he had finished battling Midian, Moshe unhesitatingly assembled the army to fight the Midianites, fulfilling Hashem’s will with joy and without delay.

Even though Moshe could have delayed the war and prolonged his life by many years, he put the needs of the Jewish People first and saw their advancement into Eretz Yisrael as the best thing for them. This act of selflessness epitomizes Moshe's relationship with the Jewish People. As the Torah later relates (Devarim 34:5), Moshe never cared for his own needs, rather, he was solely focused on the role that Hashem gave him - to lead and care for the Jewish People.

This character trait is only found in the great leaders of the Jewish People, as we see from Rav Shimon Shkop's answer to a question about the most important quality for someone to have who wants to become a "*gadol hador* - a leader of the generation." He answered that everybody identifies themselves as an "I" - with one's own needs at the forefront of his mind. For some people, explained Rav Shimon, included in that "I" is their wife and children. For others who are greater still, "I" includes their friends and neighbors. There are some even greater people whose "I" extends to their entire community; but the "I" of a *gadol hador*, concluded Rav Shimon, includes the entire Jewish People.

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE

Avnei Ezel

"Moshe spoke to the nation, saying, 'Arm men from among you for the war, that they can be against Midian, to execute G-d's vengeance on Midian.'" (31:3)

Any battle waged in the cause of Judaism must be entirely in Heaven's name, devoid of thoughts of personal gain or honor. There is some evil inherent in any fight, but when that fight is motivated by pure and honest intentions, for the sake of Heaven's honor, there is no harm in that. However, if the motives behind the fight are insincere, it can do only harm.

RECIPROCAL LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe spoke to the nation, saying, 'Arm men from among you for the war, that they can be against Midian, to execute G-d's vengeance on Midian.'" (31:3)

G-d sought vengeance against the Midianites because they had caused the death of thousands of Jews. But these Jews died because the Midianite women enticed them into idol worship and immoral transgressions. In other words, these Jews died because they had sinned!

We see here how much G-d loves His people. He cherishes even those among us who lack the moral fortitude to resist temptation, holding accountable those who take advantage of these people. This intense love can only inspire us to love Him with a reciprocal intensity, devoting ourselves to accomplishing His purposes in the world. (Sichot Kodesh 5734, vol. 2, p. 323) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

THE INNER CONFLICT

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Moshe spoke to the nation, saying, 'Arm men from among you for the war, that they can be against Midian, to execute G-d's vengeance on Midian.'" (31:3)

Rashi comments that when Moshe used the word *anashim* - "men" in instructing the people to go to war against Midian, he was referring to tzaddikim, righteous people from among the nation.

The Medrash in Shir HaShirim comments that the men who Moshe was looking for, to go to battle, were men who placed the tefillin of the arm on before the tefillin of the head.

The Slonimer Rebbe asks the obvious question: Why was the manner in which men put on their tefillin used as the sole indicator for whether they were righteous enough to defend Klal Yisrael in the war against Midian?

The Slonimer Rebbe explains that our tefillin are meant to channel and control our physical existence. The tefillin of the arm correspond to and face one's heart, while the tefillin of the head correspond to one's soul and intellect. One can only maximize one's spiritual strengths and have clarity in one's growth as a servant of Hashem once one first attains control of and reins in one's physical desires.

When fighting against a nation like Midian, whose philosophy was predicated on giving into materialistic and earthly desires, only those who conquered their emotions and desires of the heart for the sake of Hashem, even more so than their intellect, could successfully defeat the nation of Midian. It is for this reason that those who placed their tefillin on their arms before their heads, symbolizing their mastery over their emotions and feelings, were the ones to defend Bnei Yisrael in their fight against Midian.

In life, we often experience the inner conflict between what we want and what we know to be the right thing to do. The Slonimer Rebbe is reminding us to put forth all of our energy to control our physical wants and desires. If we do so, then we will have clarity to make the right decisions and ensure that we maximize our ability to serve Hashem in the best and most appropriate way possible.

FIGHTING FOR HASHEM

Sefas Emes

"Moshe spoke to the nation, saying, 'Arm men from among you for the war, that they can be against Midian, to execute G-d's vengeance on Midian.'" (31:3)

The word *heychaltzu* (arm) can mean "remove," as in "*Chaltza et na'alo me'alo raglo* - Remove your shoes from your feet" (Devarim 25:9). Moshe said that one should remove his own concerns and his honor when he goes to war. His intent should be for the sake of Heaven only.

EGOTISTIC VS SELFLESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Moshe spoke to the nation, saying, ‘Arm men from among you for the war, that they can be against Midian, to execute G-d’s vengeance on Midian.’” (31:3)

The Midianites had no reason to attack the Jews; they did so out of simple, baseless hatred. The root of baseless hatred is ego. An egocentric person feels threatened by others, for their very existence endangers his inflated sense of self. Therefore, although he may not seek to actively harm others, he will be secretly pleased when they suffer, or at least not be troubled by their suffering. Furthermore, he will be blind to other people’s good qualities. Since he is not sincere in his relationship with G-d and the world, he cannot believe that others are.

In contrast, someone who is not egocentric focuses only on other people’s good qualities. Their suffering will genuinely trouble him, since he will judge them favorably and find no justification for their pain.

Similarly, rather than viewing differences of opinion as an affront to his selfhood, the selfless person will view them as opportunities to reach higher perspectives on the truth. He will expose his shortcomings to others and seek their guidance, thereby allowing him to solve his problems and progress in his self-refinement. (Likutei Torah 3:85; Sefer HaMa’amarim 5659, p. 53; Sefer HaMa’amarim 5747, p. 183) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HIS LIFE FOR HASHEM’S WILL... GLADLY

Kli Yakar

“Moshe spoke to the nation, saying, ‘Arm men from among you for the war, that they can be against Midian, to execute G-d’s vengeance on Midian.’” (31:3)

Although Moshe had heard that his death was associated with the matter, he did it gladly and did not delay. (Rashi)

G-d said to Moshe: “Avenge the Children of Israel of the Midianites.” Why, then, did Moshe, relaying the message to the Children of Israel, say: “...to execute G-d’s vengeance on Midian”?

It was quite true that the Midianites had sinned against G-d, for they had caused His people, the Jews, to fall into immorality. But they had sinned against the Jews, too, because they had caused the death of twenty-four thousand Jews from the plague (25:9).

Therefore, G-d said to Moshe: I will forgive them the affront to My own honor, but what they did to the people of Israel I cannot forgive. Therefore, “avenge the Children of Israel of the Midianites.”

But when Moshe heard the rest of G-d’s command, the news that “afterwards you shall be gathered to your people” (31:2) - so that he knew that his death would coincide with the end of the battle against the Midianites - he feared that the Jews would protest that there was no

need to avenge their honor, since they would naturally want to prolong their leader’s life.

It was for this reason that Moshe told the people that they would have to go to battle “to execute G-d’s vengeance,” thus stressing that what was at stake was not their personal honor but the honor of G-d Himself, and that it was not in their power to forgive an affront to G-d’s honor.

Thus, it is written: “So there were delivered... twelve thousand armed for war” (31:5), and Rashi comments: “So there were delivered, meaning that they were drafted against their own will, and that they heeded the call only because Moshe had told them that they had to execute G-d’s vengeance.”

All the foregoing shows, too, that Moshe “did it gladly,” for he could easily have delayed the execution of the vengeance by relaying to the Jews the exact words that G-d had said to him; namely: “Avenge the Children of Israel”; and the result would have been that the Jewish people would have been content to ignore the affront to their honor and to take no action, so that Moshe would not die.

Moshe wanted to make sure that G-d’s will would be fulfilled and went about making plans to this end, even though he was aware that “his death was associated with the matter.”

RELYING ON HASHEM

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“A thousand for each tribe, a thousand for each tribe, from all the tribes you shall send into the army.” (31:4)

One of Moshe’s last acts is to exact revenge on Midian for their seduction of many Jews. Moshe is ordered to send one thousand soldiers from each tribe. However, the instructions are doubled: “A thousand for each tribe, a thousand for each tribe, from all the tribes you shall send into the army” (31:4).

The Midrash (Midrash Rabbah 23:2) explains that this indicates that for every soldier who fought, another came to pray for him. However, it seems from the pasuk that those who prayed joined those who fought on the battlefield. Why would the soldier who prayed have to join his counterpart on the battlefield? Couldn’t the prayers be made from the camp?

Lekach Tov quotes Rav Lowenstein, who suggests that the soldiers needed to see their counterparts’ prayers to help the soldiers understand that they are not alone and that their success is equally based on G-d’s help as it is on their own efforts. Despite the fighters being the people’s greatest leaders, they benefited from keeping their successes in perspective.

There is logic behind having endless opportunities to pray, bless our food, and sanctify other positive things in our lives, as they help maintain our perspective on all the goodness that we possess and remind us of the source of that good fortune.

CASH IT IN

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“A thousand for each tribe, a thousand for each tribe, from all the tribes you shall send into the army.” (31:4)

Parshas Matos tells about the war which Bnei Yisrael waged against the nation of Midian. Moshe instructed the people to mobilize an army consisting of one thousand men from each tribe: “אלף למטה אלף למטה לכל מטות ישראל” - One thousand per tribe; one thousand per tribe; for all the tribes of Israel shall you send to the army.”

The Midrash Tanchuma (3) and Midrash Rabbah (22:2) explain this repetitious pasuk to mean that three thousand men were recruited from each tribe: one thousand to fight the war, one thousand to stand guard, and one thousand to daven for the campaign’s success.

The Otzar Pela’os Ha’Torah notes the significance of the fact that tefillos were necessary despite the fact that Hashem specifically commanded Bnei Yisrael to wage this battle. In truth, whenever Bnei Yisrael went out to war in ancient times, this was done with Hashem’s authorization – after consulting with the *urim ve’tumim*, the part of the kohen gadol’s garments which would prophetically respond to questions posed to it.

We might have assumed that once Bnei Yisrael received Hashem’s clear authorization to fight, victory was guaranteed. After all, if He told them to go to war, then He would certainly assure their success. And yet, nevertheless, tefillos were still necessary.

No matter how confident we are of success, the Otzar Pela’os Ha’Torah explains, we still need to pour our hearts before G-d in prayer and beg for His assistance, because tefilla is an indispensable prerequisite for beracha.

We might draw an analogy to a person with a winning lottery ticket. As long as the ticket remains in his pocket, not a penny of the millions of dollars that he won will go into his bank account. He is no better off after the winning number was announced than he was previously, if he doesn’t bother to go to the lottery office and show his ticket.

The same is true of tefilla. We all have the winning ticket. Hashem has an abundance of blessing with which to shower each and every one of us. But we need to cash it in, and this is done through sincere, heartfelt prayer.

We cannot access the beracha without davening for it. The blessings are there, but our tefilos create the pipelines through which they can descend from the heavens into our lives.

REMAINING HUMBLE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Moshe, Elazar the kohen, and all the princes of the community went out to meet them, outside the camp...” (31:13)

Unlike other wars, the Levites were conscripted to fight the war against Midian, and even took a portion of the booty. This is because the purpose of this war, was to uproot the idolatry of Pe’or, the worship of sensual pleasure and indulgence in it as an end in itself, rather than for the higher purpose of infusing Divinity into reality. The Levites, consecrated from birth to the service of G-d, are always in danger of thinking that the proper response to the dangers of materiality is to renounce it altogether. It was therefore necessary that they participate in this war, in order to learn that they, too, must infuse Divinity into the elements of creation that are on the lower rungs of spirituality.

We too, as we dedicate ourselves to spiritual pursuits and climb the ladder of spiritual growth, should not allow our spiritual ascent to make us disparage those aspects of life or individuals that seem “beneath” us. As the sages (Avos 4:10) have instructed us, “Be humble before all men.” Everything and everyone has positive aspects for us to value and learn from, no matter how holy we may have become. (Reshimot 51) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DANGER OF ANGER

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“And Moshe became angry with the commanders of the army... And Elazar the kohen said to the men of war who went to the battle, ‘This is the state of the Torah that Hashem commanded Moshe...’” (31:14,21)

After waging a successful battle against Midian, the army returns with the females. Moshe is enraged that the women, who were the main culprits in seducing the Jewish men, were not killed (31:14-16). We are then told that Elazar instructs the people on how to purify foreign metals, proclaiming, “This is the statute that G-d had commanded Moshe” (31:21). If Moshe was right there with him, why is Elazar describing the laws and not Moshe?

The Gemara (Pesachim 66b) explains that this pasuk proves that anger makes a wise person lose wisdom. Lekach Tov explains that even though Moshe was justified in his anger (the army was instructed to kill the enemy, and the women were the main offenders), the spiritual nature of anger is such that it impairs us even when the situation perhaps warrants it.

The nature of anger is selfish and corrosive. Our parashah highlights all the reasons to redirect the manifestations of our anger as much as possible or, perhaps even more easily, aim for happiness and kindness instead.

NEVER TOO LATE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Elazar the kohen said to the men of war who went to the battle, ‘This is the state of the Torah that Hashem commanded Moshe...’” (31:21)

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l asked: The laws being discussed were the laws of kashering vessels. Why specifically, are these laws referred to as the "law of the Torah." What is the lesson here that is so fundamental?

Rav Moshe explained, we see from here that just like you can kasher (purify) vessels from a non-kosher status and remove the non-kosher tastes that are absorbed inside of it, so too, there is still hope for someone who has been affected by sin. He can remove his sins and become purified again with teshuva. This is the fundamental of the Torah. Never give up when you have sinned.

A NEW TYPE OF WAR

Yetev Lev

"Elazar the kohen said to the men of war who went to the battle... 'the gold, and the silver... you shall cause to pass through the fire, and it shall be purified...' (31:21-23)

The men had already returned from the battle in triumph. Why, then, does the pasuk not read "to the men of war who came from the battle"?

It is told in Chovos HaLevavos (Duties of the Heart) that a pious man said to a group of soldiers returning proudly and happily from a victorious battle: "You have won a battle, but that battle was small compared to the struggle that you must wage now, the battle against the evil inclination, which we must always fight and which grows stronger with the pride that comes with victory."

This warning was given also by Elazar to the soldiers. He made them aware that, even though they were now returning as victors from the battle against Midian, their true fight, namely, their battle against the evil inclination, was only beginning.

It was to symbolize this warning that at this point Eliezer commanded the Israelites to cleanse the vessels they had captured from the enemy. Just as they were asked to remove from these vessels the impurity absorbed from the food of the heathens, so, too, they were commanded to purify their hearts from every remnant of arrogance, so that they could arm themselves spiritually for the new and challenging struggle that lay before them.

It is written that "Moshe was angry with the officers of the army... who came from the service of the war" (31:14). Moshe was angry to see that the officers had become arrogant, regarding themselves as victors returning from the wars, when, actually, they should have girded themselves for an even more important struggle, the struggle against the evil inclination.

THE BATTLE IS NOT OVER

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Elazar the kohen said to the men of war who went to the battle... 'the gold, and the silver... you shall cause to pass through the fire, and it shall be purified...' (31:21-23)

In Parshas Matos, the Torah describes the war between Bnei Yisrael and Midian. Midian had caused a tremendous catastrophe to befall our people, by bringing immorality into our camp. Hashem commanded that we go to war and destroy the sinful Midianites. At the conclusion of the war, the pasuk refers to the soldiers as returning from the war, however, a few pesukim later they are described "*haba'im lamilchamah* - coming toward war." What is the meaning of this discrepancy?

Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Teitelbaum zt'l (Yetev Lev) quotes the famous mashal of the Chovos Halevavos: A pious man once admonished soldiers returning triumphantly from battle. "You may have returned victorious from war, but the primary battle is the continuous conflict between oneself and his yetzer hara, and that still looms before you."

Similarly, when Moshe Rabbeinu saw the soldiers returning from the war with Midian, he noticed that they were returning proudly, with the attitude that the battle was over. The soldiers knew that they must be on guard during the battle so as not to view anything indecent among the immoral Midianites, but they felt that once they returned to their homes, they were safe and did not have to be on guard. As a result, Elazar HaKohen reproached the soldiers, in the later pesukim, telling them that they were really coming toward war. They should realize that the more important battle was yet to come. He warned them that although they felt "safe" and secure from the evil of the battlefield, nevertheless, their minds had absorbed the bad thoughts and feelings from wartime and these impurities still had to be purified.

FROM DESIRE TO DEVOTION

Rebbe Nachman

"...any article that can withstand fire - these you shall pass through fire, and they shall be pure, except that they must be purified with water of sprinkling; and anything that cannot withstand fire you must pass through water." (31:23)

A person should always beseech G-d to purify his heart. If he has already begun serving G-d, he should increase his devotions with renewed passion. But if until now he has been burning with desires for the things of this world, he must transform that desire into a passion for the service of G-d.

Thus, "everything that goes into fire" - the fire of desire - "you should pass through fire" - you must transform it into a passionate devotion to G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 156:1)

SPIRITUAL PLEASURES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Take a count of the plunder of the captive people and animals, you, together with Elazar the kohen and the heads of the paternal houses of the community." (31:26)

The Torah is relatively terse about the details of the battle itself against Midian, but lists the plunder and describes its purification in preparation for Jewish use in great detail.

This is because the main purpose of the war with Midian was not to eliminate the evil that it embodied - the indulgence in sensual pleasure as an end in itself - but to teach us the proper attitude toward material pleasure. We are not meant to eschew or eliminate materiality altogether; the Torah does not recommend or idealize an ascetic lifestyle. Rather, we are meant to elevate and refine sensual pleasure by engaging in it, in accordance with the Torah's instructions, for Divine purposes. Doing so transforms the world into G-d's true home. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

IN THIS TOGETHER

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Divide the booty equally between the combatants who engaged in the war and between the entire community." (31:27)

G-d instructs that the live spoils of war with the Midianites were to be split fifty-fifty between the soldiers and the greater community (31:27). Why would people that did not go out to battle receive a portion of the spoils equal to that of the soldiers that went out and fought?

The answer can be derived from Ha'amek Davar's comments that the soldiers, Kohanim, Leviim, and even the ordinary citizens that stayed back were equally involved in the victory.

Those not chosen for the privilege to represent the nation in battle stayed back and prayed for their brothers in battle, which had such an impact on the result that they got an equal portion of the live spoils. The Kohanim and Leviim also contributed by supporting the rest of the people, which is why they received a portion of everyone else's spoils. This feeling of brotherhood starts with the attitude that going out to battle and representing our people was not just a responsibility but a privilege.

ERADICATING HATRED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Take one fiftieth from the Israelite's half... and give it to the Leviim." (31:30)

The tribe of Levi was usually exempt from military service and received none of the spoils. In the war against Midian, however, the Leviim were conscripted and received a portion of the spoils.

This is because whereas the purpose of other wars was to take possession of the Land of Israel, the attack against Midian was solely for the purpose of eradicating the evil that Midian represented. Midian had not had any reason to oppose the Jewish people; they did so only out of pure, senseless hatred.

With regard to our spiritual lives, we are all like Leviim - dedicated to furthering G-d's goals in this world. The more dedicated we become to this cause, the less concerned we become with the passing matters of mundane life. This does not mean, however, that we should ignore our surroundings altogether. Like the Leviim of Moshe's day, when it comes to fighting "Midian" - to eradicating baseless hatred between people - we need to take our stand on the front lines along with everyone else. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PERFECTLY PLANNED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The plunder consisted of..." (31:32)

(G-d then instructed Moshe to count the people and animals that had been captured from the Midianites. The soldiers were allowed to keep half and the other half was to be given to the rest of the Jewish people. The soldiers then had to give 1/500th of their half to the priests, and the people had to give 1/50th of their half to the Leviim. Moshe followed G-d's instructions, counting the captured people and animals and then dividing them up and giving the priests and Leviim their portions.)

When the soldiers counted the captured people and animals, they found that miraculously, the totals were all divisible by 50 and by 500. It was thus possible for them to follow G-d's instructions regarding the exact percentages of what they had captured to be given to the priests and Leviim. This was all the more remarkable considering all the factors that had to contribute to this miracle - such as the fertility and lifespan of the people and animals - all of which took place long before they were captured in battle.

From this, we learn that we should never be fazed by any seeming obstacle in fulfilling G-d's directives or accomplishing our Divine mission. Rather, we should recall that G-d has arranged matters long in advance to enable us to accomplish our Divine goals in the most optimal manner possible. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 13, p. 113) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

OVERRIDING NATURE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"They said to Moshe, 'Your servants have counted the soldiers who were in our charge, and not one man is missing from us.'" (31:49)

The miraculous nature of this victory demonstrated that when we are fully dedicated to G-d's will, we make nature bow to G-d's will as well; G-d overrides the laws of nature in order to crown our efforts with supernatural success.

Thus, the first inference that we can draw from this narrative is that the more we dedicate ourselves to fulfilling our Divine mission in life, the more we will see Divine providence ensuring our success, even when it appears that the laws of nature are against us.

The second inference is that our dedication will not only neutralize any adversaries or natural obstacles; it will turn them into allies and aids, just as the bounty of Midian became a boon to the Israelites. When we see this happening, we should both utilize this good fortune, and where applicable, encourage our new allies to increase their assistance. This will benefit them as well as us. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 28, pp. 264-266) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

ACKNOWLEDGING MIRACLES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"They said to Moshe, 'Your servants have counted the soldiers who were in our charge, and not one man is missing from us.'" (31:49)

Even when a battle is won, it is only natural that there will be casualties. The fact that after the battle with Midian not one of the 12,000 soldiers had been lost was a clear indication that their victory had been miraculous.

The proper response to an open demonstration of G-d's miraculous protection or favor is to acknowledge it - not to try to rationalize it. Thus, the returning Jewish army responded exactly as they should have, as is recounted in the next verse: "We therefore wish to bring an offering for G-d." They donated the jewelry found among the spoils of battle to the Tabernacle, acknowledging that they owed their victory to G-d alone.

We are taught to give a portion of our earnings to charity in any case, in order to express our awareness that it is G-d's blessing that enables us to accrue wealth (Mishlei 10:22) and that all that we possess is truly His (Divrei HaYamim 29:14). But when wealth comes our way miraculously - such that it makes no sense to think that our own efforts earned it - it should be immediately obvious that this wealth belongs to G-d even before we "give" it to Him.

By taking care to acknowledge G-d's miracles, we strengthen our ability to sense His no less miraculous involvement in our daily, "non-miraculous" lives, as well. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, pp. 68-76) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

THE SOLDIER'S SACRIFICE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"They said to Moshe, 'Your servants have counted the soldiers who were in our charge, and not one man is missing from us.'" (31:49)

Mashal: The Chafetz Chaim, Rav Yisrael Meir HaKohen zt'l, once came to the city of Vilna and stayed at an inn. He noticed a large, powerfully-built man sit down and coarsely order food. Without manners and without even making a brachah, the man began to gobble his food. The Chafetz Chaim was greatly saddened by what he saw.

The owner of the inn explained to the Chafetz Chaim, "This man is an ignorant person. At the age of eight he was seized by the Russians and sent off to serve in the Czar's army for twenty-five years. What could be expected of him?"

When R' Yisrael Meir heard these words, he walked over to the man and greeted him warmly.

"Is it true what I heard about you?" he said, "That as a child you were dragged off to Siberia and grew up in a completely non-Jewish world? Then you have suffered nightmares and torture! Yet somehow you remain faithful to the Jewish faith! You are truly one of the heroes of the Jewish people!" The soldier was deeply moved.

Nimshal: To be a Jewish soldier in the army of Klal Yisrael requires great self-sacrifice and honor. The people did not just fight for their lives; they also fought to keep the banner of Klal Yisrael aloft amongst the nations of the world. There is something special about a person who is willing to give his life to defend his people, his family and his G-d!

THE WAR AGAINST HATRED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"They said to Moshe, 'Your servants have counted the soldiers who were in our charge, and not one man is missing from us.'" (31:49)

(The officers of the army counted the soldiers in their charge, and found that miraculously, not even one was missing.)

The war against Midian was a war against baseless hatred and strife. G-d commands us to wage this war constantly, in order that hatred, discord, and spite be replaced by loving-kindness, concord, and altruism. Besides the obvious benefits for us as individuals and as a society, G-d "benefits" from this struggle as well. As the Talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva said, brotherly love is the foundation of the entire Torah.

G-d assures us that in our ongoing war against hatred - just as was the case with the original war against Midian - we will ultimately not suffer any losses: physical, spiritual, or even financial. (Hitva'aduyot 5744, vol. 4, pp. 2237-2238) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

ELEVATING THE MUNDANE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The descendants of Reuven and Gad had an abundance of livestock..." (32:1)

These two tribes wanted to live as shepherds because this occupation is conducive to a meditative lifestyle. Moshe initially opposed their proposal, since he knew that until the Messianic Era, it is G-d's intention that we confront the physical world - and even combat it when necessary - in order to refine it and elevate it.

Moshe only agreed after stipulating that they first help their brethren conquer the Land of Israel. The experience of confronting the material world would ensure that their subsequent return to shepherding would not be an escape from reality.

Similarly, we should not view the time we are forced to spend in the mundane world, elevating and refining it, as an annoying nuisance. Rather, we should view it firstly as our true Divine mission, and secondly, as the key to ensuring that we study the Torah, pray, and perform G-d's commandments with pure and proper intentions. (Reshimot 51; Likutei Sichot, vol. 33, p. 198) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DISSEMINATING CONSCIOUSNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"They [the tribes of Reuven and Gad] said [to Moshe], 'If it pleases you...'" (32:5)

(Noticing that the territory of Kings Sichon and Og - which the Jewish people had just conquered - were suited to grazing cattle and flocks, the tribes of Reuven and Gad asked Moshe if they could take possession of these territories and not cross the Jordan River into the Land of Israel. Moshe agreed, but made them promise to help the other tribes conquer their territories west of the Jordan before settling themselves on the river's east bank.)

The tribes of Reuven and Gad preferred to be shepherds (outside the Land of Israel) rather than farmers (within its borders) because the lifestyle of the shepherd affords more opportunity for meditation and communion with G-d than does that of the farmer.

Praiseworthy as this motivation was, it was too escapist. The very purpose of life is to elevate the mundane aspects of life, infusing Divinity into them rather than renouncing them.

Moshe therefore turned the tables on these tribes, stipulating that they be the vanguard of the invading force. He did this in order to train them in self-sacrifice, enabling them to face the challenge of elevating the world even while being shepherds.

From all this we learn that we must not shy away from the challenges of our Divine mission to disseminate Divine consciousness throughout the world - even in its most far-flung corners - but face them head-on. Only thus do we fulfill our task and make the world into G-d's home. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5720-5721, pp. 379-380) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SHARING THE BURDEN

Rav Chaim Aryeh Leib of Yadwavna

"Moshe said to the children of Gad and Reuven, 'Should your brothers go out to war while you settle here?'" (32:6)

Moshe Rabbeinu was unhappy with the request of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven who wanted to stay in the land east of the Jordan River. "Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?" he asked them.

What Moshe was saying was that even though Jewish people may be dispersed all over the world, we are emotionally connected. And when a Jew experiences misfortune, Jews all over the world feel compassion. Therefore, Moshe asked the tribes of Reuven and Gad, "How can you sit here calmly and enjoy your land when you know that your fellow Jews are engaged in battle?"

JOINT RESPONSIBILITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Moshe said to the children of Gad and Reuven, 'Should your brothers go out to war while you settle here?'" (32:6)

Mashal: It is well known that taxi drivers like to shmooze with their passengers, and in Israel, the taxi drivers have taken this "gift" to a new level. It is told that a friendly taxi driver was once driving the Ponovezher Mashgiach, R' Chatzkel Levenstein zt'l, to an appointment and told him about his friend who was almost squeezed to death by a jungle snake.

"Believe me, Rabbi," said the driver, "We tried to pull the snake away but it wouldn't budge."

The driver continued, "My friend was turning blue and close to death when somebody shouted, 'Yigal, say Shema Yisrael; you're gonna die!' Yigal screamed out the words and wouldn't you know - as soon as he finished, the snake released him and slithered away!"

The cabbie smiled. "Today, my friend is a religious Jew because of that incident. He, his wife, and kids all keep Shabbos and go to religious schools."

R' Chatzkel eyed the cabbie and asked, "Nu, and what about you? Are you religious also?"

"Oh no," said the driver quickly. "It didn't happen to me - it only happened to him!"

Nimshal: Every Jew is responsible for his fellow Jew. What happens to one affects us all. This was what Moshe Rabbeinu could not understand about the request of B'nei Reuven and B'nei Gad not to enter the Holy Land but to settle on the other side of the Jordan: "Your brothers are going to fight and possibly die in order to conquer the Land and you're going to stay here and not help them out? That's what the meraglim (spies) tried and look what tragedy they caused!"

EVERYONE IS AN INFLUENCER

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"And now you have arisen in your forefathers' place, a culture of sinful people..." (32:14)

The tribes of Reuven and Gad approached Moshe and requested the right to permanently settle the region of Eiver Ha'Yardein, east of the Jordan River, the land which Bnei Yisrael had captured from the kingdoms of Sichon and Og. Moshe reacted very angrily, accusing these two tribes of repeating חטא המרגלים, the sin of the spies, by refusing to proceed into Eretz Yisrael, and preferring to remain permanently outside the land.

Reuven and Gad clarified that the men would build houses for their families and corrals for their livestock, and then join the other tribes in the wars to conquer Eretz Yisrael across the river. Moshe agreed to allow these tribes to permanently settle Eiver Ha'Yardein on condition that they fulfill this promise and participate in the battles along with the rest of Bnei Yisrael.

In his initial response to Reuven and Gad, Moshe accuses, והנה קמתם תחת אבותיכם תרבות אנשים חטאים - "And now you have arisen in your forefathers' place, a culture of sinful people..." (32:14). Just as the previous generation sinned by refusing to enter Eretz Yisrael, the people of Reuven and Gad have likewise decided to remain permanently outside the land. Targum Onkelos translates the words חטאים אנשים תרבות as תלמידי גובריא חייביא - "the students of sinful people." According to this translation, Moshe describes the people of Reuven and Gad as the "students" of the people who committed חטא המרגלים (sin of the spies).

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro pointed out that, quite clearly, the people of Reuven and Gad did not sit in a classroom learning from the people who had committed חטא המרגלים nearly 40 years earlier. But they are nevertheless considered those people's "students" because, in Moshe's eyes, they were influenced by them and were now following their example. What this shows, Rav Shapiro commented, is that we are all "teachers." We all have "students." Everything we say and everything we do has some impact upon the people around us. People are always watching us and listening to us. Even if we have no formal educational position, we are "teachers" in that people are observing us and being influenced by our conduct. This concept is expressed also by the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (5:19) which lists the qualities that characterize תלמידי אברהם של אברהם אבינו - the students of Avraham - and the opposite qualities, which characterize תלמידי בלעם של בלעם הרשע - the students of Bilam. One becomes a "student" not only by attending formal classes, but also by observing and emulating somebody's behavior.

Many people today strive to be "influencers," to have their voices heard, to have a strong social media presence with thousands of "followers" and "subscribers." But the truth is that we're all influencers. In our homes, in our shuls, at work, at the gym, in the supermarket, driving on the roads - our behavior has a subtle influence. Our influence cannot be measured and quantified by "likes" and "followers," but it is real. We all have countless "students" who have, in some way, been affected by the way we speak and act.

WORTH A LISTEN

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"They [the children of Gad and the children of Reuven] approached [Moshe] and said, 'We will build pens for our cattle here... but we ourselves will be quickly armed to go out in the front of the Children of Israel...'" (32:16-17)

Why did Gad's children and Reuven's children allow Moshe to rebuke them bitterly for cowardice before telling him the true motives behind their request for the land east of the River Jordan?

In Chassidic writings there is a story from the boyhood of the Holy Rabbi of Ger, author of the treatise Sefas Emes. Still a boy, he had slept late one morning after having sat up all night long studying with a friend. His grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, in whose home he was raised, came into his room and sternly reprimanded him for having slept late instead of rising early to pray.

Throughout the scolding the lad stood quietly, listening attentively to his grandfather's words without attempting to utter so much as one word in his defense. Later, a friend who had been witness to the scene turned to him in surprise and asked him: "Why didn't you tell your grandfather that we had been up all night studying?"

The lad responded: "I didn't want to stop him because I wanted to hear more of his words of reproof."

As he spoke these words, the boy opened his Chumash and pointed out to his friend this exact pasuk from Bamidbar, saying: "If the tribes of Gad and Reuven had the intention to cross the River Jordan armed for battle to help their brethren conquer the land, shouldn't they have told Moshe so at once, when he began to reprimand them, saying: 'Shall your brothers go to the war and shall you sit here? Thus did your fathers act when I sent them from Kadesh-Barnea to see the land...' Why should they have allowed Moshe to heap upon them so much rebuke and chastisement (see pesukim 6-17), to call them a 'brood of sinful men' and threaten them that if they would turn away from G-d again He would leave them in the wilderness and so you will destroy all this people?"

"My answer is that they allowed him to continue because they would have considered it their loss if Moshe had stopped. They were eager to hear more words of moral instruction from him."

FAMILY REUNION

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"They [the children of Gad and the children of Reuven] approached [Moshe] and said, 'We will build pens for our cattle here... but we ourselves will be quickly armed to go out in the front of the Children of Israel...'" (32:16-17)

As the Jews approach the end of their journey through the desert, our parashah relates the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad to settle east of the Jordan rather than inherit a piece of the land of Israel.

Moshe initially protests but then grants their request as long as they fight with their brothers on the front line. Very matter of fact, we learn that half the tribe of Menashe is included in the settlements east of the Jordan. Why would Menashe be instructed to settle there when they never asked for it, and why would only half of the tribe be included?

Ami Silver of Aleph Beta suggests that there is a subtext to these negotiations between Moshe and the tribes. When Moshe warns the two tribes that they may be punished, the Torah says, *“Va’yosef od - And G-d will leave the nation to die in the desert again”* (32:15). To which the tribes respond by approaching Moshe with their intentions to defend their brothers (32:16-18), just like Yehudah approached Yosef in defense of his brothers years before (Bereishis 37:22). These references coincide with the tribe of Menashe, who was named by Yosef because he represented a new beginning (ibid., 41:51). When Moshe observed that sibling rivalry seemed to be a thing of the past, he added Menashe to mark a fresh start and serve as a reminder to keep looking forward.

By dividing Menashe’s tribe, Moshe created a connection between both sides of the Jordan River and united the family in purpose. What gave Moshe the comfort that the tribes would act as a family was the way Reuven and Gad approached him to explain their position. The lesson is far-reaching: respectful and thoughtful dialogue among family, friends, and even adversaries will lead us to greater understanding and a more collaborative future.

BEYOND SUSPICION

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“You shall be vindicated from G-d and from Israel” (32:22)

As the tribes of Reuven and Gad negotiate their settlement across the Jordan, Moshe arranges that once Israel is conquered with their help, the two tribes would be permitted to settle outside of Israel, and *“innocent [of the obligations to conquer] from G-d and from Israel”* (32:22). While the obligation to help conquer Israel makes sense as one between the tribes and G-d, what obligation would the tribes have to each other?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks proposes that while it may be simple to be innocent in the eyes of G-d by avoiding wrongdoing, being innocent in the eyes of peers requires avoiding even the suspicion of wrongdoing. We find this in halachah (law), where perceptions of our actions are considered just as relevant as the actions themselves, a Rabbinic principle called *maris ayin* (literally, appearance to the eye).

We are challenged to conduct ourselves in a way that is above suspicion, not because we seek others’ approval, but because we are role models responsible for representing the Torah to ourselves and others we meet. As Rabbi Sacks says, *“We must do our best to be charitable in our judgment of others and scrupulous in the way we conduct ourselves.”*

FOR THE WILL OF HASHEM

Maharam of Amshinov

“The children of Gad and the children of Reuven spoke to Moshe, saying, ‘Your servants will do as my lord commands.’” (32:25)

At first glance, there’s no essential difference between what Moshe told the children of Gad and of Reuven and what the members of these tribes had said to Moshe before. Why, then, did they not say: *“Your servants will do as we have spoken,”* rather than, *“Your servants will do as my lord commands”*?

Originally, they had said to Moshe: *“...but we ourselves will be quickly armed to go out in front of the Children of Israel”* (3:17). At that time, they had been concerned only with going out to aid their people in the conquest of the Promised Land. They did not say then that they would do so for Heaven’s sake, in order to do G-d’s will.

But in his answer to them (3:20-24), Moshe consistently stressed that their preparation for battle was to be *“before G-d”*:

“If you will do this thing; if you will arm yourselves to go before G-d to war” (3:20); *“and every armed man of you will pass over the Jordan before G-d...”* (3:21); *“and the land will be subdued before G-d...”* (3:22). Rashi comments that after Moshe had impressed this important fact on them, the children of Gad and Reuven corrected themselves and said: *“And your servants will pass over, every man that is armed for war, before G-d, to battle...”* (3:27).

“My Lord” in the statement *“as my Lord commands”* refers to G-d, implying that the children of Gad and Reuven intended to arm themselves for Heaven’s sake, not out of considerations of patriotism and self-interest, but solely for the sake of Heaven’s honor and in order to do G-d’s will.

DIVINE PROTECTION

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

‘And the tribes of Gad and Reuven answered, saying, ‘As Hashem has spoken to your servants, so shall we do.’” (32:31)

Mashal: A member of the Israeli Air Force was attending some course requirements between assignments. One of the courses was taught by a professor who was an avowed atheist. One day the professor walked into the classroom and shocked the class when he looked to the ceiling and flatly stated, *“G-d, if You are real, then I want You to knock me off this platform. I’ll give You exactly fifteen minutes.”*

The lecture room fell silent. Ten minutes went by and the professor proclaimed, *“Here I am, G-d; I’m still waiting.”*

As the final moments ticked away, the soldier got out of his chair, went up to the professor, and gave him an upper cut, knocking him clear off the platform.

The other students were shocked. The professor came to, noticeably shaken, looked at the offender and asked, "What in the world is the matter with you?"

The soldier calmly replied, "G-d was busy today protecting our soldiers, who are protecting your right to say ridiculous things and act like a fool. So He sent me to take care of your request."

The classroom erupted in cheers.

Nimshal: The "Army of Hashem" was created thousands of years ago and still functions today, fighting the battle against the impure enemy from without and protecting the Jewish people, wherever they may be, from within. Anybody who will look at the history of the Jewish army, the *ovdei Hashem*, from time immemorial, will have no choice but to recognize that Hashem is protecting His soldiers, through miracles and Divine intervention, so that they can protect His people.

ELEVATING THROUGH POSITIVITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The descendants of Reuven built... and changed the names of the cities they built." (32:37-38)

The original names of these cities were associated with the idolatries that were practiced by their original occupants. Changing their names was an act of conquest, of taking something formerly associated with idolatry and appropriating it for holy purposes. In this sense, the tribes of Reuven and Gad were continuing the task that began with Moshe's stipulation that they cross the Jordan with their brothers: that of elevating the lowest ends of the spiritual continuum to holiness.

We see here that by referring to something in a positive, holy way, we can firstly dissociate it from whatever former, negative stigma it might have had, and secondly, ensure that it serve a positive moral and spiritual purpose from now on. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 33, p. 198) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SHINING LIFE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Ya'ir son of Menashe went and conquered the villages, and he named them 'The Villages of Ya'ir.'" (32:41)

The word used here for "villages" (*chavot*) is related to the word for "life" (*chai*), and the name Ya'ir means "will shine." Thus, "The Villages of Ya'ir" means "Locales of life where light will shine."

This name expressed the spiritual transformation that Ya'ir intended for these formerly idolatrous villages to undergo. Idolatry, the antithesis of Divine consciousness, is equivalent to spiritual death: the idolater severs himself from G-d, the source of life. By including these villages in the Jewish national homeland, Ya'ir was transforming them from domains of death into gardens of life.

Similarly, whenever we take any aspect of material reality, which by the very nature of materiality opposes Divine consciousness, and utilize it for Divine purposes, we "resurrect" it, releasing it from the realm of death and transforming it into a source of life and light. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 38, pp. 120-121) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MASEI

OUR TRAVELS AND TRAVAILS

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael..." (33:1)

The sojourning of the Jews in the desert, their travels and travails, are reflected today in the travels we undertake when we go to our houses of prayer and when we travel to the tzaddikim. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 150)

The Jews' travels in the desert enabled them to tread upon the kelipot, as represented by the "snakes, serpents and scorpions" (Deuteronomy 8:15). These kelipot appear to each person in the form of the fears he experiences. If one elevates his fears to the fear of G-d alone, he can tread upon and vanquish all other fears. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 200)

From their travels, they made Torah! Wherever the Jews went in the desert, they subdued the forces of evil and transformed each place from a spiritual wasteland into an oasis of Torah. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 166)

Halachah (הלכה, Jewish law) is related to Halichah (הליכה, walking). The travels of the Jewish nation in the desert were meant to seek out, clarify, and elevate the laws and ideas that until then were hidden and concealed. The same applies to each person today. One should view his travels as ways to clarify the paths to draw close to G-d, and to elevate paths that are not yet well-trodden with spirituality into service of G-d. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 274)

JOURNEY OF LIFE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael who left Mitzrayim..." (33:1)

The founder of Chasidism, Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, taught that these 42 journeys correspond to the 42 spiritual journeys that we make throughout our lives. We begin from birth, just as the Exodus from Egypt is the Jewish people's national birth. The final journey is to the spiritual Promised Land, the life that awaits us in the afterlife.

Although some of the intervening journeys in the Jewish people's trek through the desert were accompanied by setbacks, all the stations on our spiritual journey through life are meant to be holy and positive. If we choose good over evil, we will indeed live through these phases of life in the way G-d intends. If, like the Jewish people in the desert, we make some wrong choices, we will experience them as temporary setbacks. Although at every step in the journey of life, we strive to make the right choices, we should also recognize that even setbacks can be transformed into positive, growth experiences. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, p. 1083) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HASHEM CHERISHES EVERY STEP

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael who left Mitzrayim..." (33:1)

In the subsequent verses, all forty-two of the Nation's encampments while wandering the desert are listed. Bearing in mind that there are no wasted words in the Torah, Rashi brings the following elucidation from Rebbe Tanchumah to explain why every place is mentioned: "This can be compared to a king who had a son who was very ill and he took him to a distant place to cure him. As they were returning [home] his father began to count all the journeys. He said to him, 'Here we slept. Here we felt cold. Here you had a headache, etc.'" This illustrates the love and care that Hashem has for His children, the Jewish People.

The appellation "Father" is not an arbitrary title to describe Hashem, rather, it teaches us a very specific aspect of our relationship with Him. In order to understand this on a deeper level, Rav Yerucham Levovitz teaches us a penetrating insight about the reality of Creation. He explains that no aspect of Creation had to be - because Hashem was not limited in any way when He made the world. In fact, the Zohar explains (Parashas Terumah 161b) that the world was created from the Torah and its mitzvos. As such, mitzvos were not given in response to any aspect of creation, rather, the world exists only as a result of the mitzvos.

For example, the common view is that since we have a father, we were therefore given a mitzvah to honor him. However, since mitzvos preceded the world's creation, Rav Yerucham explains that the opposite is true: because Hashem wanted to give us the mitzvah to honor, He therefore created the concept of a father. For this reason and this reason alone, every child is born with a father with whom to perform the mitzvah of "honoring" (Daas Torah, Parashas Mishpatim; Shemos 21:1).

With this introduction, we can now revisit Rashi's words and understand more about our relationship with Hashem. Every father naturally wants his child to succeed and gets immense pleasure from all his achievements, no matter how small. Taking the lesson we learned above, we may suggest that the joy a father feels at his child's

success is not merely a natural expression of his happiness, rather, it provides us with a profound understanding of Hashem's joy at His child's success!

To illustrate this further, a toddler who has just started to take his first steps may not seem to go very far, but the father who witnesses this latest stage in his child's development is full of joy. You will not find him measuring how many inches his child walked to determine whether he should be happy, rather you will see the immense pride and excitement that every loving father expresses at his child's success. So too, we should not feel that we are alone in our challenges.

If we manage to overcome a test that we are struggling with, we should imagine Hashem's immense joy at our achievements. We should not underestimate His concern for every single detail of our lives. He is not "too busy" feeding the hungry or clothing the poor to care when we succeed in any of our struggles. This image will help us significantly as we continue to take further strides and head toward success.

EMBRACE THE JOURNEY

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael who left Mitzrayim..." (33:1)

The Torah subsequently lists the forty-two places where Klal Yisrael encamped while in the desert.

The Slonimer Rebbe (Nesivos Shalom) asks what significance lies in the Torah detailing Bnei Yisrael's travels. The Torah only shares that which we could learn from. The Torah doesn't include stories unless there is an eternal teaching that we can grow from.

The Degel Machaneh Efraim quotes the Baal Shem Tov and explains that the Torah details the various places that Klal Yisrael traveled to in order to teach us an important lesson. Just as the Jewish people needed to go on their journey with many stops along the way to help them grow, we too are positioned by Hashem to go through many stops on our odyssey of life to help us grow.

Klal Yisrael's journey began when they departed Mitzrayim and were born as a nation. Their trek through the desert ended when they arrived in Eretz Yisrael, which is the apex of kedushah. Similarly, we begin our journey when we are born and navigate life's challenges with Hashem's help, which serves as the impetus for our growth. Our journey concludes when we arrive at Gan Eden, the pinnacle of kedushah, just as Klal Yisrael's journey came to an end when they arrived at Eretz HaKedoshah.

Life is an adventure that includes many obstacles along the way. We need to remind ourselves that if Hashem brought us to it, He will also bring us through it. Let us embrace the journey so that we can become the best versions of ourselves!

FROM DESERT TO PARADISE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael..." (33:1)

Because the Jews who left Egypt proved unready to enter the Land of Israel, G-d decreed that they wander in the desert until the next generation would be ready to take their place. Yet, if G-d's intent was only to keep the original generation from entering the Land of Israel, He could have had them live in some other, hospitable area outside the Holy Land. Even if it was necessary for them to remain in the desert, G-d could have let them remain in one location. Yet He had them spend at least half of the 40 years wandering in the desert.

The reason for this was because their wanderings served to transform the inhospitable, dangerous desert into a habitable, even hospitable place. Wherever the Jews traveled with the Tabernacle, the desert was transformed temporarily into a luxurious oasis (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:26).

Similarly, our environment or our personal lives can sometimes seem like a spiritual "desert," devoid of spiritual life and hostile to the civilizing effects of a holy, optimistic lifestyle. Rather than let this glum situation depress us, we can recall that G-d has placed us in this spiritual desert in order to transform it into a spiritual paradise. And He has given us all the power that we need to accomplish this task. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 13, pp. 16-18)
- Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

IN MERIT OF THEIR LEAVING

Chasam Sofer

"And Moshe recorded their goings forth, according to their journeys, at the bidding of Hashem..." (33:2)

When the Jews were in Egypt, they had sufficient faith to follow Moshe into the wilderness. It was for the sake of this exceptional merit that they were redeemed, as is written in Yirmiyahu: "I remember for you the affection of your youth... how you followed Me in the wilderness in a land not sown." (Jeremiah 2:1).

Thus, the "goings forth" of the Jews had been granted them because of the merits they had gained by assuming the burdens of wandering through the wilderness.

Later, however, when the Jews sinned and complained to G-d, they were threatened with annihilation. They were saved only because Moshe prayed for them: "O Hashem, why does Your anger flare up against Your people that You have brought forth from Egypt?" (Shemos 32:11). "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying: For evil did He bring them forth?" (Shemos 32:12). It is clear, then, that they were able to go on and enter the Promised Land solely because of their having gone forth from Egypt.

"And these are their journeys" - the journeys that followed "their goings forth" came to pass only because they had gone out of Egypt.

BRINGING JOY TO HASHEM

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Moshe recorded their goings forth, according to their journeys, at the bidding of Hashem..." (33:2)

At the beginning of Parshas Masei, many commentators are bothered by the Torah's seemingly irrelevant inclusion of the names of all forty-two places that the Jewish People camped in the desert on their way into Eretz Yisrael.

The Sforno answers that Hashem wanted to publicize the Jewish People's greatness in following Him to each place and consequently becoming worthy of entering into Eretz Yisrael.

If we consider this approach for a moment, we are faced with an incredible insight into Hashem's relationship with us. In Egypt, the Jewish People suffered for two hundred and ten years under a nation that hated them. Their children were thrown into the Nile, placed into walls and who knows how many more untold and unspeakable horrors took place. The Jews witnessed numerous miracles protecting them from the Egyptians and taking care of their needs as they fled. As the sea split, each Jew - even the maidservants - was granted a level of prophecy even greater than Yechezkiel was ever able to reach (Medrash Yalkut Shimoni 244). Their enemies were drowned and the Jews took their riches. Then they went on to receive the Torah and devote themselves to Hashem at Sinai, spending their remaining years in the desert being completely looked after by Hashem.

And after all of this, Hashem still praises them for following Him to each of the forty-two encampments? Why would the Jews not have wanted to follow Hashem under such conditions? Even if they wanted to return to Egypt, enemies were waiting to kill them the moment they left the Clouds of Glory which constantly surrounded the Camp. So, even though following Hashem in the desert was the most obvious and logical option, and the decision not to follow Him, or even to return to Egypt was illogical to the point of suicide, Hashem still viewed the fact that the Jewish People followed Him at every single interval as a meritorious act on their part - enough to chronicle all of these encampments in the Torah!

If this is how Hashem regards our actions when we are only doing what seems to be the only feasible option, how much more so is His joy when we follow His ways in times that are more difficult and when the options are not so clear?

PERSONALIZED ATTENTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"These are the names of the men who will inherit the land on your behalf." (33:17)

We are all leaders, whether in our families, in our circle of friends, or among our work associates. In our roles as leaders, we must follow the example of the tribal leaders of the Jewish people.

Just as they assigned every member of their tribe a tract of land appropriate to that individual's needs and abilities, we should make sure that our "followers" are employed in the best way possible, both for themselves and for the group. We also learn how to do this from the tribal leaders: Just as they assumed ownership of their respective territories on behalf of their fellow Jews, so should we put ourselves mentally in the place of each and every one of our followers in order to appreciate each one's unique personality and strengths.

The true and ultimate leader, of course, is G-d Himself. It follows that when G-d assigns each of us our task in life, He does so in accordance with our unique strengths, gifts, and talents. Therefore, should we ever wish that our specific challenges in life were different than what they are, we should recall that G-d gave us these challenges, tailoring them precisely to our abilities and in accordance with our best long-term interests. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 33, p. 205) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ELICITING HASHEM'S ASSISTANCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you drive out [the present occupants of] the land, you will settle it, for I have given you the land in order to take possession of it." (33:53)

G-d commanded the Jewish people to divide up the Promised Land among those entering it according to a specific process. Part of this process was logical, allocating the land according to the population of the various tribes. But part of the process was seemingly arbitrary, assigning the various parts of the land to the tribes by lot.

The division of the land by lot was meant to remind us that the laws of nature and logic do not operate in the Land of Israel to the same extent that they do in the rest of the world. G-d's presence is more openly revealed in the Holy Land.

On the other hand, the division of the land according to population was meant to remind us that Divine revelation occurs only after we have paved the way for it, utilizing our natural powers and talents to the best of our abilities to accomplish our Divine mission. We thereby elicit His supernatural assistance, crowning our efforts with success beyond that which we could have achieved by ourselves. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CRUCIAL LESSONS

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"The open spaces of the cities that you give to the Leviim should extend outwards from the city wall, one thousand cubits all around." (35:4)

Two thousand cubits of land surrounded each Levite city. The inner 1,000 cubits were to be left empty for the inhabitants' use. The outer 1,000 cubits were designated for fields and vineyards. (Rashi)

Eleph (אלף, one thousand) is spelled the same as *Aleph* (א, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet). To truly take refuge from the forces of evil, one needs the two lessons of Rebbe Nachman that begin with the letter Aleph (א). The first is *Azamra!* (אזמרה, I will sing), which speaks of finding the good points within oneself (Likutey Moharan I, 282). For the "land" should be planted, and you can find good things to "grow and develop" within yourself. But when you think that things are very bad and you have so many unanswered questions, you must recall the lesson of *Ayeh?* (אייה, Where) (ibid., II, 12). Even though the "land" seems empty, devoid of G-dliness, it is not. It serves a purpose, and G-d exists even there. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 75a)

REFUGE FROM EVIL

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"The towns that you assign to the Leviim shall comprise the six cities of refuge that you are to designate for [a man] who has killed someone to flee to; and in addition to them, you shall provide forty-two cities." (35:6)

The six cities of refuge represent the verse of Shema Yisrael, which contains six words. The forty-two cities correspond to the number of words in the passage of *V'ahavta* (You should love) (Deuteronomy 6:5-9). Thus, the Shema provides refuge for the individual who wishes to avoid the forces of evil.

Each of the cities of refuge was surrounded by an additional 2,000 cubits of land for the planting of trees and shrubbery. These 2,000 cubits allude to the *techum Shabbat* (Shabbat boundary). Shabbat represents faith, which is another means of refuge from evil. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 138-70a)

PROTECTED BY LOVE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"The towns that you assign to the Leviim shall comprise the six cities of refuge that you are to designate for [a man] who has killed someone to flee to; and in addition to them, you shall provide forty-two cities." (35:6)

The holy Apter Rav, R' Avraham Yehoshua Heshel, zt'l, (Oheiv Yisrael) provides a more esoteric understanding of the concept of arei miklat. The Torah commands Bnei Yisrael to build six cities of refuge, corresponding to the six words in the pasuk, "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad." In these words of faith, every Jew can place his trust in the Almighty and find refuge from the plaguing influences from without.

Then, "onto these, add forty-two cities" - a reference to the forty-two words contained within the first parshah of Krias Shema, beginning with "V'Ahavta," which will infuse every Jewish soul with a deep-rooted love of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. These symbolic "cities of refuge" will secure and vigilantly protect every Jew who turns to them, from any harm in the world.

TORAH OF REFUGE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The towns that you assign to the Leviim shall comprise the six cities of refuge that you are to designate for [a man] who has killed someone to flee to; and in addition to them, you shall provide forty-two cities." (35:6)

Allegorically, the Torah itself is the "city of refuge," for when we are immersed in its study, internalizing the Divine consciousness it gives us, we are protected both from our own unholy passions and from the negative influence of our materialistic environment (Makkos 9b-10a).

Besides helping us not to commit any misdeeds, studying the Torah also protects us from the ill effects of past misdeeds. It inspires us to regret our past failings and to make amends for them. And when we repent properly, our sins are transformed into merits. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 363) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SAFE HAVEN

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"The towns that you assign to the Leviim shall comprise the six cities of refuge that you are to designate for [a man] who has killed someone to flee to; and in addition to them, you shall provide forty-two cities." (35:6)

The Torah records the *halachos* pertaining to someone who accidentally murdered and is exiled to the *arei miklat*. The accidental murderer is obligated to run to the *arei miklat* for protection from the victim's relatives who may attempt to avenge the murder.

The Chiddushei HaRim suggests that we can learn a very powerful lesson from the procedures described in the Torah. If a person recognizes his or her mistakes and wants to run to a place of salvation, through returning to Hashem, the Torah will provide a safe space for protection, just as the Torah provides the *arei miklat* for an accidental murderer. However, if a person continues to commit aveiros without any recognition or desire to do teshuvah, Hashem will not provide a place of shelter for them to run to, as he or she doesn't even feel the need for protection.

The Chiddushei HaRim provides an incredible source of *chizuk* for all of us. Oftentimes, we feel that we have made too many mistakes that have caused so much distance between Hashem and ourselves. We feel as though we are a lost cause and are too embarrassed and ashamed to attempt to reconnect to Hashem. The Chiddushei HaRim is teaching us that as long as we are willing to own our mistakes and attempt to rectify them, Hashem will facilitate an environment for us to re-establish our relationship with Him. Hashem yearns for our return; we just need to take that first step and accept responsibility for our actions. Once we do so, Hashem and the Torah will help us the rest of the way!

ENHANCING CONNECTIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The towns that you assign to the Leviim shall comprise the six cities of refuge that you are to designate for [a man] who has killed someone to flee to..." (35:6)

The reason why Levite cities served also as cities of refuge was because the Leviim's lives were the antithesis of unintentional murder. The murderer's confinement to these cities therefore served to neutralize the effect of his crime.

Unintentional murderers were liable to the death penalty only if the murder was the result of their negligence. Negligence that can result in another person's death is a blatant disregard for other people's welfare. This insensitivity toward other people is diametrically opposed to the ideals of brotherhood exemplified by the Leviim. The Leviim's role is to connect the Jewish people with G-d - through the Tabernacle (and Temple) service - and to connect them with one another, by teaching them the Torah.

Similarly, all of us can learn from and emulate the Leviim. We should all strive to enhance our own connection to our fellow human beings, their connection to each other, and their connection to G-d, so that we always take care to ensure that no physical or spiritual harm come to another person. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, pp. 97-98) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

LIVING SIGNPOSTS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You must designate [six] cities for yourselves that will act as cities of refuge." (35:11)

The roads leading to the cities of refuge had to be kept wide and clear, so that anyone who would need to use them could do so easily. Signs were also posted at every crossroads, in order to clearly mark the way to these cities of refuge.

Similarly, G-d keeps the way to the lifestyle of the Torah (our spiritual "city of refuge") open, accessible, and clear for each of us. In addition, He sends us signs and signals to help us find the right direction in life.

In order to hear G-d's voice more clearly, however, we should help others find the right direction in their lives. We should all consider ourselves "signposts," whose job it is to point others in the direction of life and goodness. When G-d sees that we are showing others the way, He will show us our way more clearly.

Ideally, we should try to be more than just inanimate "signposts," helping only those who come to us in search of the right way. We can be living signposts, reaching out to our fellow human beings and, if necessary, awakening them to the fact that a holy, Divine life should be their highest pursuit. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, p. 363) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

WHEN THERE'S NOWHERE ELSE TO GO

Chiddushei HaRim

"You must designate [six] cities for yourselves that will act as cities of refuge." (35:11)

To any Jew who has had the misfortune of having slain someone by accident and is therefore so abjectly crushed that he can no longer find his place in this world, G-d says: "I shall appoint a place for you," a city of refuge where such a person will be safe from the avenger and find peace. But as for the person who is not so terribly stricken by what he has done and who can still "find his place," there is actually no safe place and the cities of refuge will not offer asylum. Thus, the Sages (Makkos 12) say that the prince of Edom is destined to make three errors, as it is written: "Who is it that comes from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah?" (Yeshayahu 63:1). He will err, first, as only Bezer affords asylum, but he will go to Bozrah; he will err again because asylum is offered only to slayers in error, but he slays with intent; and he will err again, since asylum is offered only to men, but he is an angel.

The fact that this evil angel is capable of finding a place to hide as in a fortress proves that he is not so crushed as to be unable to "find his place," and therefore the cities of refuge cannot afford him asylum.

(The Sefas Emes adds: This is why Sukkos follows Yom Kippur. If we truly repent of our sins on Yom Kippur, and as a result we feel so humble and dejected that we cannot "find our place," G-d will devise a place for us beneath His own shadow - the shade of the sukkah - and protect us from all evil.)

WE ARE ONE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He [the murderer] must remain there until the death of the Kohen Gadol." (35:25)

(The unintentional murderer must remain in the city of refuge until the death of the current high priest. The death of the righteous atones for the sins of the generation; the death of the righteous high priest will atone for this tragedy of unintentional murder.)

In linking the inadvertent killer specifically to the high priest, the Torah has effectively adopted the attitude of the Jewish people's very first high priest, Aharon. Aharon loved all Jews and drew them to the Torah; the Torah institutionalized this love as an integral aspect of the high priesthood.

This teaches us a great lesson in brotherly love and Jewish unity: No matter what heights we have reached on the ladder of spiritual or social status, we must remain concerned with all elements of society, even criminals. And even if we think that we, like the inadvertent killer, are on the lower rungs of humanity, we must remember that we are still connected with those on the highest levels, for we are all one people.

WHOLEHEARTED PRAYER

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"He [the murderer] must remain there until the death of the Kohen Gadol." (35:25)

The mothers of the *kohanim gedolim* would supply food and clothing [to the people in *arei miklat* (cities of refuge)] so that the residents of *arei miklat* shouldn't pray that their children die. (Makos 11)

One who kills by accident must remain in the *arei miklat* until the *kohen gadol* dies. This may possibly prompt them to pray for the *kohen gadol's* death. To prevent this, the mother of the *kohen gadol* would supply them food and clothing, so they would feel content living in the *arei miklat*, and they wouldn't pray for her son's death.

Is this all it takes?! Were the food and clothing that the *kohen gadol's* mother sent them so beneficial that they weren't interested in leaving anymore? Furthermore, why was the *kohen gadol's* mother so afraid of their *tefillos*? These unintentional murderers weren't the greatest *tzaddikim*, as they have this grave sin on their shoulders.

The answer is that the people in *arei miklat* still wanted to leave, but the food and clothing made living there a bit more bearable. Now, if they pray for the *kohen gadol* to die, they won't daven with a complete heart. When you pray with all your whole heart, your prayers are effective. It doesn't matter who you are. Your *tefillos* will bear fruit.

SAFE TO COME HOME

Abarbanel

"He [the murderer] must remain there until the death of the Kohen Gadol." (35:25)

When a Kohen Gadol died, the entire nation trembled and repented of its sins. It could therefore be assumed that the blood-avenger would also reconsider, calm himself and no longer seek to execute vengeance for the accidental killing of his kinsman... It would then, therefore, be considered safe for the murderer to leave the city of refuge and return to his home.

THINKING ON YOUR FEET

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And our master was commanded by Hashem to give the inheritance of our brother Tzelofchad to his daughters." (36:2)

Mashal: There was once a man who had a beautiful daughter whom he sheltered from all evil. Once, when the local poritz came to collect a large debt, he saw the girl and wished to take her for a wife. Both the man and his daughter were horrified at the idea.

The poritz decided to make a deal with the man. He would pick up two colored stones from the ground and put them in his hat. The girl, he said, would randomly choose one

stone. If she picked the black stone, she would become his wife and the man's debt would be wiped clean. If she chose the white stone, she would not have to marry him and her father's debt would still be forgiven. But if she refused to choose any stone at all, both she and her father will be thrown into jail and left to rot there.

The poritz bent down and picked up two stones. The sharp-eyed girl saw that he had actually picked up two black stones. What could she do? If she chose a stone she was lost, and if she refused to choose, it would be worse.

Finally, she came up with a plan. She put her hand into the hat and withdrew a stone. Suddenly, she stumbled and dropped the stone on the ground. "Oh, how clumsy of me," she said. "But never mind, just take a look in the hat and see which stone remains, and you'll know which one I chose!" The poritz knew he had been outsmarted and left!

Nimshal: Like the girl in the story, Chazal tell us that the daughters of Tzelofchad were wise women. This was proven to be true when they recognized an unfavorable situation and appealed for justice, with which they were ultimately rewarded. The moral of the story: Most complex problems do have a solution; sometimes we have to be clever enough to come up with a unique way to handle them.

SIEZING THE OPPORTUNITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Let them marry whomever they please, but they shall marry only to the family of their father's tribe." (36:6)

The elders of Tzelofchad's tribe raised a concern that if the women married someone from another tribe, their inheritance would flow to the male heritage, and their tribe would lose that land (36:3-4). G-d's response to them is "Let them marry whomever they please, but they shall marry only to the family of their father's tribe" (36:6).

The Gemara wonders how those two statements make sense. Can they marry as they please, or can they marry only within their tribe? The Gemara answers that the second statement was just a suggestion. And if it was merely a suggestion, why does the Torah later say that Tzelofchad's daughters did as they were commanded (36:10)?

Rav Shimon Schwab proposes that although marrying within the tribe was only a suggestion, Tzelofchad's daughters viewed it as a commandment and acted on it.

Many commandments in the Torah can be circumvented, but there is boundless beauty in carrying out the commandments rather than sidestepping opportunities to serve G-d and therefore forfeiting the potential for growth. This episode is a fitting bookend to Sefer Devarim, which enlists us to find ways to participate in and connect with the Torah.

BIG IMPACT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

[G-d told Moshe,] "Each person... will remain attached to the inheritance of his fathers' tribe." (36:7)

The laws of inheritance, although an integral part of the Torah, were only given by G-d after five adult, unmarried and orphaned sisters - the only children of a member of the tribe of Menashe - claimed that they were entitled to their father's portion of the Land of Israel. Their private petition to Moshe led to the revelation of sections of the Torah that subsequently became binding on the Jewish people as a whole.

This teaches us that we should never think that our private lives concern only us or our immediate circles of family or friends, and that therefore we are free to conduct ourselves in these matters however we see fit. Just as these women consulted with Moshe regarding what appeared to be a purely personal matter, so should we consult with qualified rabbinic authorities regarding even the most seemingly insignificant aspects of life, for even our private actions have wider implications that we may not immediately foresee. (Hitva'aduyot 5747, vol. 4, pp. 152-153) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

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