

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI · 28 TAMMUZ 5764 · JULY 17, 2004 · VOL. 11 NO. 39

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE BEST OF REASONS

“Avenge the Children of Israel against the Midianim who enticed them into immorality and idol worship. Afterwards you will be gathered to your people” (22:5)

From this verse we learn that G-d made Moshe’s passing from this world contingent on the destruction of Midian. The commentaries praise Moshe for immediately taking action against Midian rather than postponing the war and extending his life. It’s difficult to conceive that Moshe, to whom G-d spoke “face to face”, would have had the remotest desire to cling to a life in this world for an extra year or two if he knew that this ran counter to the wishes of the Almighty. So what calculation could Moshe have made to suggest he delay the war and extend his life? What possible motivation could Moshe have had – and resisted – that earned him this praise?

The answer is to be found in a very similar circumstance in the book of Joshua.

G-d promised Joshua that he would not pass away until he had finished dividing the entire Land of Israel for the Jewish People. Joshua however took his time in completing the division of the Land, as it says “A long time Joshua made war with all those kings” (Joshua 11:18). As Joshua delayed the Children of Israel from settling in

the Land that has ten kinds of holiness, so too G-d, measure for measure, hastened Joshua’s demise by ten years and he died not at the age of 120 like his teacher Moshe, but at 110. This was the fulfillment of the verse “Many are the thoughts in a man’s heart, but G-d’s counsel will prevail.” (Mishle 9:21)

What were the thoughts in Joshua’s heart that caused him to tarry in his task?

Joshua reasoned that it would be beneficial to the Jewish People if he did not make great haste in concluding the battle against the 31 kings of Canaan, because he knew that after his passing the Jewish People would degenerate morally and no longer serve G-d wholeheartedly. Joshua reasoned that while he was still alive he would be able to guide the Jewish People and stop this downward trend.

Moshe is known as “eved Hashem”. The word eved

means “slave.” A slave is someone who ceases to have a separate identity from this master. He is so contained within his master and his master’s will, that his will and that of his master are indistinguishable.

Joshua acted for the best of reasons, but when it comes to fulfilling the word of G-d with alacrity “Many are the thoughts in a man’s heart, but G-d’s counsel will prevail.”

• Source: Bamidbar Rabba 22:5

“Many are the thoughts in a man’s heart, but G-d’s counsel will prevail.”

OHRNET magazine is published by Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College

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A QUESTION OF PRIORITIES

When it comes to settling in Eretz Yisrael it is most important to determine priorities. This message was subtly conveyed in this week's Torah portion by Moshe to the children of Gad and the children of Reuben. These two tribes had requested to receive their share of the Promised Land on the east side of the Jordan River after joining the other tribes in conquering the entire Land. How would their families fare while the men were away at war?

"Pens for the flock shall we build here for our livestock," they proposed (*Bamidbar 31:16*) "and cities for our young children".

But when Moshe reviewed their proposal he said: "Build for yourselves cities for your young children and pens for

your flock" (*ibid. 32:24*).

Rashi points out that Moshe subtly rebuked them for being more concerned about their possessions than their children, as expressed in what they mentioned first. Put first things first, he told them. First take care of your children and then your flock.

The sad state of the secular educational system in Israel, both in terms of pupil behavior and academic achievement, is undoubtedly the result of a society which made material possessions its priority rather than its children. The words of our greatest teacher, Moshe Rabbeinu, echo in our ears today, urging us to put first things first in order to secure Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

BREAD OR STOCKINGS?

A couple of weeks ago Jews throughout the world marked the tenth Yahrzeit (anniversary of death) of one of the great *chassidic* leaders of the past generation, Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam, the Klagenberger Rebbe.

Scores of legends have been related and written about this extraordinary sage, especially about his experiences in a concentration camp and the encouragement he provided for his fellow sufferers during the war and after their liber-

ation. Assuming the role of surrogate father to surviving orphans, he consented to offer each of them, boys and girls, the parental blessing customarily given before Yom Kippur.

After blessing one such girl he gently urged her to wear stockings for the sake of feminine modesty. When she asked in return whether her severely limited funds should be used for buying bread or stockings, this warmhearted Torah giant quickly removed his own stockings and gave them to her.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Matot

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

to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

Masei

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

Matot

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

Masei

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

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

Matot

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

Masei

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

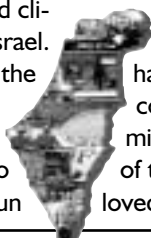
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THE LAND OF IDEAL CLIMATE

It is difficult to find places in the world with year-round climates as pleasant as what one finds in many parts of Israel. But even when this weather can be a little trying the lover of the Land doesn't complain.

Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi were two Talmudic Sages who moved from sun to shade when it got a little too warm for their Torah learning, and from shade to sun



when it got a little too cool. From the explanation they gave for their moves it is clear that they could have managed to continue their studies despite the discomfort. They nevertheless devoted some precious minutes to moving to avoid the temptation to be critical of the weather in the Eretz Yisrael they so respected and loved.

ALL OR NOTHING AT ALL

“**T**he *kohanim*”, writes Rambam (*Laws of Bikkurim 1:1*), “were awarded 24 gifts, all of them explicitly mentioned in the Torah. Regarding all of them a covenant was made with Aaron. Any *kohen* who does not believe in one of them has no portion in the priesthood and receives none of these gifts.”

The source for this ruling is in our *gemara* which bases it on a passage in the Torah. In discussing the portions of the *shelamim* sacrifice which are awarded to the *kohanim* the Torah writes: “The one who sacrifices the blood of the *shelamim* and its fats, from amongst the sons of Aaron, to him shall be awarded the right leg as a portion” (*Vayikra 7:33*). This is interpreted by our Sages as an indication that only one who conducts himself in all matters like the sons of Aaron is entitled to such a portion, to the exclusion of a *kohen* who deviates from his commitment in even one matter. The gift of sacrificial portions mentioned in this passage serves as a prototype for eligibility for all the other gifts.

Where is there such an indication in this passage?

In his commentary on *Chumash*, Malbim points out that from a grammatical angle the phrase “from amongst the sons of Aaron” should have followed the phrase “the one who sacrificed the blood of the *shelamim* and its fats” because it serves as a modification of “the one” mentioned at the outset. Whenever the Torah thus places a phrase out of grammatical order, it is a signal to see in this phrase a special significance. In this case the message is that it is not sufficient for receiving gifts awarded to *kohanim* to be a genealogical descendant of Aaron alone but a full spiritual one as well. The descendant who has reservations about any of the obligations or gifts assigned to Aaron is therefore ineligible for “any portion in the priesthood and receives none of these gifts”.

• *Bechorot 30b*

THE LAWS OF FLAWS

The Torah prohibited inflicting a *mum* (flaw) on a first-born animal or any other animal which has been consecrated for sacrificial purposes. Does this prohibition apply to a sacrificial animal which has already been disqualified through a flaw?

Two conflicting opinions are mentioned in our *gemara* and they revolve around the definition of the word *kol* used in the passage containing the prohibition.

In regard to the animal qualified for sacrifice the Torah states that “If it is flawless it shall be willingly accepted (by

G-d), *kol mum* (all sorts of flaws) shall it not have” (*Vayikra 22:21*).

Rabbi Meir saw in the all-inclusive term “all” an indication that no matter how many flaws the sacrificial animal has it is forbidden to inflict another. The other Sages ruled this out on the basis of the first part of the passage which speaks of a flawless animal which will be willingly accepted as a sacrifice. Only in regard to such an animal is there a prohibition to disqualify it by inflicting a flaw and not in regard to an animal already disqualified because of a flaw.

How do these Sages apply the all-inclusive term *kol*?

They apply it to a situation where a man causes a flaw to come about in a sacrificial animal in indirect fashion. The example cited is that of one placing a chunk of dough on the ear of the sacrificial animal in order to invite a dog to come and eat it and incidentally inflict a wound on that ear. Even though this was not inflicted directly, the all-inclusive term *kol* serves as a prohibition for such action.

Tosefot points out that even those Sages mentioned in *Mesechta Pesachim* (43b) who are reluctant to interpret every *kol* as an all-inclusive term will agree that in this particular case it should thus be interpreted because there is a logical basis for assuming that the Torah prohibited disqualifying an animal through a flaw no matter how it is done.

• *Bechorot 33b*

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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Published by Targum Press / Distributed by Feldheim

PONYTAIL

From: Anonymous

Dear Rabbi,

I am an observant divorcee and after many years of being single I have finally found a man who is suitable and whom I plan to marry. He is also religious and we are very compatible. The only thing is, he has a ponytail, which I actually like very much, but I was wondering if it's forbidden or if there are spiritual considerations that might warrant cutting it off?

Dear Anonymous,

First let me wish you a heart-felt mazal tov on your wedding plans. May everything work out smoothly, and may G-d bless the two of you with happiness and fulfillment together in a life of Torah and *mitzvot*.

Regarding the issue of a man having a ponytail, or long hair in general, there are halachic, social and kabbalistic issues to consider.

Unlike a *nazir*, who grows his hair for religious reasons and not as a matter of style, when a man grows long hair or a ponytail, the main concern would be the prohibition against dressing up like a woman or appearing in a way that a woman would. This concern applies to men's earrings as well. The question is whether long hair or earrings are "exclusively" associated with the opposite sex.

The definition of what constitutes male or female dress becomes unclear when the style is usually worn by one gender, but is also worn by some members of the opposite gender. It would seem that since some men have long hair and/or earrings, and are usually recognized as men and not women, technically it would be permitted.

Another halachic concern regards tefillin. Excessive hair between the tefillin and the forehead, for example, may be considered an intervening substance that invalidates the mitzvah. However, the main problem with this seems to be with a certain hairstyle (*blorit*) where the hair is grown long and folded over to a place where it doesn't grow. Tefillin that lies on such a patch of hair is considered to be resting in an unnatural way.

In the case of a ponytail, while this wouldn't pose a problem with the tefillin at the front, it would pose a problem regarding the back since the knot of the tefillin would be resting on hair pulled back from the front. If the hair were left loose though, so that the knot rests on the hair that grows there naturally, it seems that it would be okay. After all, the *nazir* fulfilled the mitzvah of tefillin despite his long hair.

Nevertheless, from a social or spiritual point of view, it may be improper or inappropriate for an observant Jewish man to do so. First, it is not the Jewish custom for men to have long hair and ponytails; incorporating that style from the non-Jews into Judaism seems improper. Also, long hair

(and hairstyles in general) normally stem from, or lead to, vanity. While it's a mitzvah to be presentable, it's inappropriate for a Jewish man to focus too much on his appearance and the appearance of his hair. Even those who grow side locks for religious reasons must not be preoccupied with them more than what's necessary for an orderly appearance.

According to the Kabbalah, in a spiritual sense hair is the waste product of the brain. Long strands of hair in men may act as ropes to which negative influences may take hold. This is considered particularly true regarding the hair at the back of the neck near the brain stem, which is the point of connection between the brain and the rest of the body. Harmful influences seek to attach there in order to "sever" a healthy connection between the spiritual and physical, effecting a sort of spiritual decapitation.

Interestingly, the Zohar differentiates between the rest of the hair and that at the sides of the head and the beard. This hair is said to originate from holy sources and projects positive spiritual energy: "The hair locks are shaped and hang in wavy curls from one side to the other side of the skull. This is what is written, 'His locks are wavy'....They are situated hanging in curls, because they flow forth from great springs of the three divisions of the brain. From the spring of the first space in the skull, [Chochmah]....From the second space, [Binah]....From the third space, [Da'at] go forth thousands of thousands of rooms and chambers, and the hairs flow forth continuously from all. Therefore, these locks (of the beard) are curls upon curls."

To answer your question then, 1] strictly speaking according to halacha there seems to be no prohibition; 2] as far as long hair may affect character traits, that may not be the case here, and anyway we all have room to improve; 3] most people don't conduct themselves according to the Kabbalah. Therefore, while I'm not condoning long hair for men, his not cutting it off shouldn't be a reason to "cut it off". Rather, if and when you get married, patiently and lovingly encourage him to round off his observance with a more outward Jewish appearance as well, cutting off the unwanted splinters of non-Jewish influence, and spurring new growth together from Jewish roots.

Sources:

- Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, *shlita*, said that although he doesn't condone men wearing earrings, it's not necessarily halachically forbidden to do so.
- Shulcan Aruch, Orach Chaim 27:4; Mishna Berura and Kaf HaChaim.
- Zohar, Ha'azinu states: 1] The hairs are places of harsh judgment, as in the verse, "for He crushes me with a tempest" (Job 9:17), where the Hebrew word for tempest is phonetically similar to the word for hair. 2] Hair at the back of the neck indicates harsh judgment as in the verse, "and they have turned their back to me and not their face" (Jeremiah 32:33). 3] There are no judgments in the hair of the beard.
- Regarding the curls of the hair on the sides of the head and the beard, see Zohar, Naso.

REBUKE THE TALKERS

Question: In the synagogue where I pray there are a couple of individuals who cannot refrain from carrying on a conversation during the Repetition of the Service and the Reading of the Torah. I am aware that this is wrong and that it should be stopped. What is the right way for me to achieve this?

Answer: When people do what you describe they are not only violating the *halacha* by showing such vulgar disrespect for the sacred activities taking place in such holy surroundings, but are also guilty of denying those around them the ability to properly concentrate on what they are hearing. It is for this reason that the *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 124:6)* rules that such people should be rebuked. Your question, however, is what is the most effective way of achieving results.

The first step, of course, is to try talking to them, one at a time, and pointing out the gravity of their irreverence,

stressing its damage to you. This is important because the same person who will respond negatively to reproof about his religious behavior will usually be prepared to accommodate the needs of a fellow worshipper.

But even if you succeed in gaining a begrudging commitment to stop the gabbing, the battle isn't over. The temptation to swap the latest news may easily cause the gabbers to forget their promise. Your reminder to them can come in the form of a "Shah!" or a frown in their direction, or by pointing to one of those signs prominently displayed in many synagogues which warn against such behavior.

The main thing is – don't give up! People who come to pray in the synagogue have a basic appreciation of their responsibilities to G-d and to their fellow worshippers. If they occasionally succumb to the temptation to talk when they should not, it does not mean that they are incapable of improving their behavior if you continue to monitor them gently but firmly.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

Ask! – The Book?

Firstly I think your Ask! (Ask the Rabbi) section is fantastic, and I wanted to know if you plan to publish it in book form (I hope you do. It will be an invaluable service for Judaism.) I would just like to offer a suggestion.

Sometimes I'd like to look up the source of a certain point in your responses. I know you quote footnotes at the end of the section, but since it is not numbered to correspond to each salient point, I can't look up a particular point and I don't have the time to look up all the sources to find the part I'm interested in. I hope this can be corrected in a book version.

Your articles are an invaluable aid for teachers and students, and by briefly providing additional sources in the footnotes and expanding on the points there it will help those wishing to pursue your sources in depth.

I hope you will take my suggestions, and this in no way detracts from the awe and admiration I have for your great work.

• Y. G., Australia

To Life! (Raising the Glass - Ohrnet Chukat)

Very nice collection of reasons! I once heard another rea-

son. When "skila" (stoning) was the death meted out by the Beit Din court, as the Talmud in Mesechet Sanhedrin teaches, they used to give the guilty one a drink prior to the punishment. Therefore we say "L'chaim" as if to say "L'chaim v'lo lamaves!" – "To life and not to death!"

Maybe that is where the expression "stoned" or "stone drunk" comes from! Be well and thanks so much for your amazing work.

By the way, I frequently quote from your columns when I give my shiur lessons to those who are "not yet observant."

Wishing you continued success,

• B. R.

Re: The True Soul-Mate (Ohrnet Balak)

Thank you for the beautiful, sensitive, and profound response you wrote to that woman.

• C. C.

A Flash of Inspiration

Your article in Parshat Chukat:- Have I Got a Deal For You! – was truly outstanding. As always, Yashar Koach. This was, perhaps, your best to date.

• Nahum