

OHR ONLINE

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

DAYS OF PROMISE

“...for to you have I given the Land to possess it...” (33:53)

Far be it from me to wax political in a column devoted to the weekly parsha, but I couldn't help being struck by something I saw written by one of the greatest minds to plumb the depths of Torah's mysteries — the Bnei Yisasschar.

The Bnei Yisasschar writes that the Torah portions of *Matot* and *Masei* — whether they are read separately, or, as this year, together — always fall in the period of time known as *Bein Hametzarim*. *Bein Hametzarim* is the three weeks between the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz and the fast of the Ninth of Av.

These three weeks are notorious in Jewish history. Typically, they are a period of tragedy and suffering. It was during this time that the spies were forming their ill-conceived impressions of Eretz Canaan which led to the Jewish People's disastrous rejection of the land of Israel on the Ninth of Av. Later, it was these three weeks that saw the destruction of both Holy Temples and the untold suffering that accompanied it.

This is the time of year that saw the destruction of Betar nearly 2,000 years ago by the ancient Romans, in which thousands of Jews were massacred without mercy.

In more recent times, the Jews were expelled from Spain on the 9th of Av in 1492. On the 9th of Av in 1914 the First World War began. And in the early hours of July 23 in 1942 the first train transport of “deportees” left Malkinia, Poland. The train was made up of sixty closed cars, crowded with people — Jews from the Warsaw ghetto. The car doors were locked from the outside and the air apertures were barred with barbed wire. That was the 9th of Av 1942, the day the first killings started at Treblinka.

Says the Bnei Yisasschar, at this time of the year when we are at a low ebb spiritually and emotionally, the Torah readings of *Matot* and *Masei* come to give us strength. Where are these words of comfort and optimism to be found?

These two *parshiot* deal with the division of the Land of Israel among the Jewish People. They assure us of G-d's eternal promise to the Jewish People: “*To these, you will divide the land.*”

Even if sometimes it looks that rather than receiving our inheritance we are giving it away, we should never forget G-d's eternal promise that we are the rightful and eventual inheritors of this Holy Land. For ultimately we will see that “*To these, you will divide the land.*”

To “these” and to no other.

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.

ALIYA AND THE FAMILY

Much of this week's double Torah portion about the geography of Eretz Yisrael and Jewish settlement of the land is relevant today when Jews throughout the world have an opportunity to settle in Israel but run into some unexpected problems. Jewish identity and aliya to Israel are noble Zionist ideals shared by virtually all Jews – until it hits their own family!

Take the case of Roberta Sands, an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Work. Nearly a decade ago her daughter became Orthodox and moved to Israel. Her experience in dealing with this separation prompted her to conduct a study of 14 middle-aged and elderly women whose daughters had become observant and made aliya. Following are a few of her findings:

Initially, the mothers were generally hostile to the religious turn of their daughters but positive about their aliya. Their feelings changed with the passage of time as they reconciled themselves to their daughters' religiosity but became

upset about being separated from their grandchildren.

The geographical separation between mother and daughter actually improved their relationship. It helped the daughters mature and establish themselves as different from their mothers. Many of the daughters may have transferred their dependence on their parents to their religious communities and rabbis who provide them with counseling and emotional support.

In order to accommodate their daughters and their families when they visited the States the mothers tried to become more knowledgeable about Judaism and Israel, a big boost to promoting intergenerational family continuity. When the mothers visited Israel they dressed modestly according to the norms of their daughters' community.

The question that arises from reading this study must be: is it not worth a little sacrifice on the part of Jewish mothers to see aliya and return to Jewish heritage guarantee a solid and secure Israel forever?

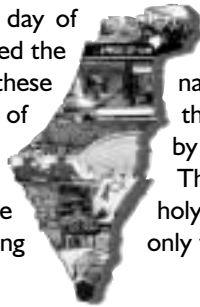
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

A COMFORTING THOUGHT FOR THE THREE WEEKS

The three-week period between the 17th day of Tammuz when the Roman invaders breached the walls of Jerusalem and the 9th of Av when these enemies destroyed our *Beit Hamikdash* is a period of mourning for the Jewish nation.

As we reflect on the exile that our people suffered as a result of the tragedies that took place during this period, we reflect on a comforting



thought provided by the Ramban in his commentary on the Torah. In the warning given to the Jewish nation that their betrayal of G-d will be punished by exile the Torah declares that our enemies will be taken aback by the desolation they see in the land they conquered.

This is a comforting promise, writes the Ramban, that our holy land will never welcome our enemies. It will prosper only when the people to whom it was granted populate it.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE T-SHIRT DID IT

Every student at Ohr Somayach has his own special story of how Divine Providence led him back to his roots. The story of J. G. revolves around a T-shirt with some Yiddish letters on it.

It all goes back to a Jew in Massachusetts who watched with pain as refugees who had arrived in the U.S. after World War II daily threw away Yiddish newspapers and books as they stopped speaking and reading Yiddish in order to assimilate into the American culture. Appalled by this abandonment of Jewish culture he began collecting the material left on the curb by his neighbors, and eventually established the International Yiddish Book Library in Boston.

J. G.'s parents had little knowledge of Orthodox Judaism but were curious to see what went on at the book fair hosted by this library. For their toddler they bought a souvenir size 8 T-shirt, with the library's name and logo imprinted on it in Yiddish.

Years later, he begrudgingly attended a Sunday morning class in a Conservative Hebrew School in the southern community to which they had moved. The class was taught by the wife of the rabbi of the local Orthodox synagogue, whose curiosity about the reason for his wearing such a T-shirt led to a relationship with the family, which eventually resulted in the entire family becoming observant and sending their son to Ohr Somayach.

MYSTERY OF THE REMAINING BLOOD

What happened with the blood of the *olah* sacrifice that remained in the sacred vessel after some of its contents had been sprayed upon two corners of the altar as required?

There is no explicit mention in the Torah that the remaining blood should be poured on the base of the altar as is the case of all the *chatat* sin offerings (*Vayikra* 4:7-34). As should be familiar to all who say the *mishnayot* of our current *Perek "Eizehu Mekoman"* as part of their morning prayers, there is also no mention in the *mishna* regarding the *olah* about what is done with the remaining blood, as there is in the preceding *mishnayot* where we are taught exactly where the blood remaining after application is poured.

One might assume from both of these observations that there is no need to pour the remaining blood of the *olah* on the base of the altar. This assumption is rejected by our *gemara*, however, based on the phrase "he shall pour its blood on the base of the altar," which appears in regard to the king's sin offering (*Vayikra* 4:25), which teaches pouring the remaining blood of the *olah* and all other sacrifices on the base of the altar. Although we now have a subtle Torah source, the mystery remains as to why the *mishna* does not mention it.

Tosefot (Zevachim 53b) offers two solutions. One is that only in the case of the *chatat*, whose blood was applied to the top corners of the altar by the finger of the *kohen*, was there enough blood remaining in the vessel to necessitate pouring this remnant on the altar base. The blood of the *olah*, in contrast, was sprayed from this vessel on the altar, so that nothing remained to be poured on the altar base.

Tosefot rejects this explanation, because our *gemara* clearly indicates that in regard to all sacrifices, remaining blood was poured on the altar base. The preferred solution to this mystery is based on a careful analysis of the preceding *mishnayot*. After the first *mishna (47a)* states that the blood remaining from sacrifices whose blood is applied in the *heichal* sanctuary must be poured on the western base of the altar, the next *mishna (52b)* teaches that in regard to the *chatat* whose blood is applied only on the altar in the *Beit Hamikdash* courtyard, the pouring of the remaining blood is to be done on the southern base of the altar. Once the *mish-*

na has established the southern base as the place for pouring remaining blood it is expected that we will extend this requirement to all other sacrifices whose blood application was made only to this altar base.

• *Zevachim 51a*

THE FATEFUL DISCOVERY

David's great adversary was Doeg, and many passages in his *Tehillim* describe the pain he suffered from him. There is no indication in the verses, either there or in any other place of Tanach, as to what was the catalyst for the fierce jealousy of Doeg that motivated him to so aggravate David. In our *gemara*, however, we learn that David hinted at the source when he said "For the envy concerning Your house has consumed me" (*Tehillim* 69:10). This is interpreted by the Sage Rava as a reference to the envy felt by Doeg towards David when he succeeded in deducing from passages in *Devarim (17:8, 33:12)* and *Yehoshua (18:12)* the exact location where the *Beit Hamikdash* was to be built.

Maharsha notes that this interpretation fits in perfectly with the passage preceding the above-mentioned source of Doeg's envy. In it David bemoans the fact that "I was a stranger to my brothers and a foreigner for my mother's sons" (*Tehillim* 69:9). This is a reference to the incident described in *Mesechta Yevamot (76b)* of Doeg attempting to disqualify David because he was descended from the Moabite convert, Ruth. Because of his envy of David for discovering the *Beit Hamikdash* site, Doeg wished to extend the Torah ban on male Moabite converts on fully entering the Congregation of Israel to female Moabites as well — to make David a stranger to his brothers because of his great-grandmother — until it was conclusively established that Doeg was wrong.

David's discovery, which he made in cooperation with the Prophet Shmuel (*Shmuel I 19:18*), was the result of a strenuous effort which he described as the struggle he made after vowing that "I will not come into the shelter of my home nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes nor slumber to my eyelids until I discover the place for my G-d..." (*Tehillim* 132:1-5).

• *Zevachim 54b*

PARSHA Q&A ?

Matot

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

Masei

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

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to 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.

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SOUL-MATE

From: Jennifer in Boulder, CO

Dear Rabbi,

My friend told me that everyone is born with a predestined husband or wife. I'm really curious about this idea. What determines who my match is? Can one miss his or her match or change it? I have lots of questions about this, but I'll hold back for now....Thanks!

Dear Jennifer,

Throughout the Torah, we find G-d acting as matchmaker between a specific man and woman. G-d officiated the marriage of Adam and Eve; when Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to choose a wife for Isaac, Rebecca's family admitted, "the match comes from G-d"; even the match between Samson and Delilah is attributed to G-d. Furthermore, our Sages taught, "40 days before the formation of the fetus it is decreed in Heaven 'the daughter of so-and-so is to be matched with so-and-so'." Matching is not an easy job, however, and is best left up to G-d, as the following story illustrates:

A Roman noblewoman once asked Rabbi Yosi ben Chalaftha, "Since your G-d has finished creating the universe, what has He been doing?" He answered, "Making matches." She said, "Is that all? I have many male and female slaves and I can pair them off in an hour." That night she paired off a thousand male and female slaves. The next morning one's head was split and another's eye was gouged. One's arm was injured and another's knee was broken. One complained "I don't want her" and another demanded, "I don't want him."

Regarding your question of what determines one's soul-mate, one opinion maintains that although G-d determines the match, it occurs under the influence of *mazal*. In general, *mazal* refers to the configuration of planets, stars and constellations at the time of one's birth. As in other areas affected by *mazal*, G-d decrees when a particular soul should be born, such that the "match-*mazal*" will dictate the character traits and opportunities needed to guide one to his or her match.

One may ask (as you did), if the soul-mate is predestined by G-d, can one miss or change the match? Yes, one may miss the match by being impatient or overly choosy. When

older people who had not yet married would ask the Steipler Rav, Rabbi Yaakov Kanievsky, what happened to their Heavenly appointed match, he would say that surely it was sent but the person rejected it. Still, there is hope for one who has missed the match. Our Sages note that Samson "rebelled with his eyes" in marrying the Philistine woman, yet the verse says that the marriage was from G-d. They resolve this apparent contradiction by teaching that although Samson lost his soul-mate by undue focus on good looks (a sin for his high spiritual level), G-d saw to it that his choice would result in some good — in this case, to save Israel from the Philistines.

Regarding "upgrading" the soul-mate, most commentators maintain that prayer and good deeds can help. The Midrash relates that Leah was destined for Esav, and Rachel for Jacob. Leah "cried her eyes out" and beseeched G-d that she not fall in the hands of such a wicked person. Eventually, not only did she marry Jacob, she married him before Rachel did. It's worth noting that Eliezer and Leah only prayed in a general way for the best match, not for a specific person. Therefore when requesting an "upgrade," one should only pray for better match-*mazal*, not for a specific person, who may not be a proper soul-mate.

While we've explained that one's match is influenced by *mazal*, many commentators assert that it depends only on one's good or bad deeds. They argue that unlike other factors influenced by *mazal* like looks, health, and intelligence that are relevant even in childhood, a match is only relevant later in life and is determined by what a person has made of himself. The Kabbalists reconcile the opinions by saying that a match is a combination of both Heavenly decree and a person's merit. According to the Zohar, a soul is comprised of male and female parts that are united in the soul world but are placed in different bodies. If their deeds are meritorious, G-d who knows the whereabouts of each part, combines them as they originally were. The "click" or "chemistry" felt between soul-mates, then, is the joy both halves feel in finally becoming whole.

Sources:

Shidduchim and Zivugim, Rabbi Yehuda Lebovitz; *Genesis 24:50*; *Judges 14:4*; *Sota 2a*; *Vayikra Rabba 8:1*; *Rashi, Sota 2a*; *Sota 9b*, *Maharsha*; *Moed Katan 18b*, *Ritva*, *Tosafot HaRosh*; *Bereishet Rabba 70:15*; *Rambam Shemone Perakim ch. 8*, *Meiri Sota 2a*, *Tosafot Ta'anit 4a*; *Rabbi Menashe ben Israel, Nishmat Chaim, part 2 ch. 8* and *Rabbi Yaakov Emden on Sota 2a*; *Zohar, Lech Lecha 91b*, *Vayechi 229a*; *Ramban, Emunah V'bitachon ch.24*.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

... the Ohr Somayach Web Site sends more than 200,000 e-mail articles each month to subscribers..

E-MAIL SEE MAIL

Question: I work in a large office with numerous staff members. I am in charge of downloading e-mail messages and putting them in the appropriate trays. When the name of the addressee appears clearly at the top there is no problem. But often the only way to find out whom they are for is by scanning the message. I have no wish to read other people's mail, but I must get the mail delivered. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The *cherem* (ban) instituted by Rabbeinu Gershom a millennium ago against reading another's mail was intended to protect the privacy of the people sending and receiving letters. In situations where it is obvious that they have no interest in protecting this privacy this ban can hardly apply. It is for this reason that a case has already been made for

exempting postcards from this ban because the very nature of their exposed contents indicates that the writer had nothing to hide from the eyes of others.

Although it is clear from the above that you have no reason for concern about reading the e-mail messages that come to your office in order to determine whom they are for, there is one caution that must be exercised. There is a natural curiosity about what is doing in other people's affairs, which must be controlled even when you are not in outright violation of any ban. When one becomes too "nosey" in a legitimate situation it can become habit-forming.

In conclusion, it is a fair assumption that none of your bosses has any interest in downloading e-mail messages by themselves, and will be very pleased to have you read as much as you need in order to know if the e-mail is for them.

PUBLIC DOMAIN _____

Re: Reincarnation (Ohrnet Chukat-Balak)

An Ohrnet reader has brought to our attention that Targum Press has recently published a book authored by an Ohr Somayach alumnus (Rabbi Yaakov Astor 1982-3) about the scientific underpinnings of the Jewish afterlife, which includes an entire section on reincarnation and Judaism. It's called "Soul Searching" and was written for people like Steve who posed the question in that issue of Ohrnet. For more information please check out the website of Targum Press: www.targum.com [Ed.]

Re: Reincarnation (Ohrnet Chukat-Balak)

I just want to say how fascinating your answer was to the question on reincarnation. Keep up the good work.

It is an odd thing, but sometimes one meets someone for the first time only to feel that they have known this person before, or that they seem very familiar. Your answer provides a possible explanation.

• H. L.

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FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Summer 2003