



Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy



# שמע קולנו

“יתגבר כארי לעמוד בבוקר לעבודת בוראו”

Parshas Matos - Masei

פרשת מטות - מסעי

## The Story of the Killer and the Levi

*David Wartelsky (20)*

As *Bnei Yisroel* prepare to enter *Eretz Yisroel* after wandering for forty years in the desert, Moshe *Rabbeinu* receives the commandment to establish six cities as designated *arei miklat*, as well as the forty-two *arei liviyah* where the *kohanim* and *levi'im* lived, as cities of refuge for people who killed others inadvertently. These cities would provide refuge and safety to these unintentional murderers from the families of their victims, who would reserve the right to kill the murderer until he arrived at the *ir miklat*. Conveniently, the *arei miklat* and *arei liviyah* were scattered throughout *Eretz Yisroel* and the Reuvein-Gad-Chatzi Menashe Bloc on the Eastern bank of the *Yarden* river (There were 3 *Arei Miklat* on each side of the river and a scattering of *Arei Levíaa*). Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who was pinning to enter *Eretz Yisroel*, established the cities in the Reuvein-Gad-Chatzi Menashe Bloc, and his successor, Yehoshua, set up the remaining cities once *Bnei Yisroel* conquered the land.

Conceptually, the *ir miklat* is a fitting punishment for the killers: like the loved ones of the one they killed, they are suddenly forced to separate from their families, and cannot leave the *ir miklat* for a lifetime (until the *Kohen Gadol* dies). But what is interesting about the *arei miklat* is not their symbolism, but rather the permanent residents of the *arei miklat*, the *levi'im*. Would a teacher put the well-behaved kids in a detention room with kids who inadvertently misbehaved? No! So why did *Hashem* make the *arei leviyah* into *arei miklat*?

To answer this question, we must jump a few weeks back, to *Parshas Korach*. Korach was a *levi* who was upset about his lack of power, which he thought that he deserved based on his lineage and stature. In his aggravation and thirst for power, he

tried to steal the *kehunah* from Aharon and leadership from Moshe by launching a large-scale protest against the structure of the religious institution. Korach was not alone in this venture. He was joined by a few of his neighbors from *Shevet Reuven*, which was directly across from the camp of Kehas (where Korach lived). Among these neighbors were Dasan and Aviram, the two *reshaim* who had been involved with numerous plots against Moshe in the past. Rashi quotes the *Medrash Tanchuma* (Korach 4/8, depending on the edition) which says that from the story of Korach, we see the concept of “*oy lirasha, oy lishcheino*” - it is terrible for a wicked person, and it is terrible for his neighbor.” In other words, merely living near bad people can influence one to do bad things, such as what happened to *Shevet Reuven*. However, Rashi only quotes half of the phrase. The second half reads “*tov litzaddik, tov lishcheino*” - it is good for a righteous person, and it is good for his neighbor.” From here we see the exact opposite concept - if one lives near *tzaddikim*, he will be influenced to do good, and will therefore have a better life.

The *mishna* in *Pirkei Avos* (4:14) quotes Rabbi Nehorai's statement that one should always “seek out a place of *Torah*.” The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 137b) says that Rabbi Nehorai was just a pseudonym for Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach, who was one of pioneers of the *Torah* hub that was the great *yeshiva* of Yavneh. He eventually left, causing his learning mind to become stunted (*Koheles Rabbah* 7:7). Because of this, he administered his warning in the *mishna* cited above. From the example of Rabbi Nehorai, we see that going to a place of *Torah* is not merely enjoyable, but oftentimes, it can be the difference between spiritual life or death.

Jumping back to this week's *parsha*, the concept of an *ir miklat* plays off of a combination of the “*tov litzaddik, tov lishcheino*” principle and the Rabbi Nehorai statement. The reason why we send the

killers to the *arei leviyah* is so that they can be surrounded by *Torah* and *tzadikim*, such that they will hopefully grow to be more conscientious of their actions and take more caution before doing things. This is the whole purpose of the *arei miklat*.

The American Prison system holds close to one fourth of the world's prisoners, despite the fact that the American population is only 5% of the world's total population. In addition, most of the criminals sentenced to jail time end up returning once they are released. However, in Sweden and other Nordic countries, prisons have been closing due to lack of returnees to prison. This is because of their rehabilitative methods. All of the prison officers in the US are tasked with discipline and discipline only, which stirs up dissent and disobedience amongst the prisoners themselves. On the other hand, in the Nordic countries, all of the prison officers double as counselors, to whom the prisoners turn for help and guidance. The prison officers develop personal relationships with the detainees, often eating lunch with them and speaking with them on a variety of subjects. The prisoners also had access to luxuries which we consider basic: televisions, ping-pong tables, and other things that connect them with the outside world. This is the job that the *levi* would play in the *ir miklat*. He was meant to have an influence on the killers simply by

being there and commanding respect for a man of God. He would speak with them and connect with them, thereby influencing them to self-introspect and improve their behavior. The city environment would provide the detainees with a Jewish social structure where they could keep up with the news and be granted basic luxuries. Through this study, we see that the Jewish "prison" system is statistically proven to be the best kind for rehabilitation, more than three thousand years before the first Swedish prison opened its doors.

From this analysis, we see that the concept of an *ir miklat* is reflective of the best rehabilitative system in the world today. The *amita shel Torah* (truth of the *Torah*) and *chochmas hachachamim* (wisdom of the sages) can be clearly seen through the *ir miklat* and its basic concepts. The placement of the murderers with the *levi'im* is no coincidence; it was perfectly orchestrated this way by *Hashem* himself, to allow those exiled to do proper *teshuvah*.

The message of the *ir miklat* isn't just for murderers, but for us as well. We must always consider the potential repercussions of our actions before doing them, as well as making sure to stay within the right crowd of people to keep us on the path of growth in *avodas Hashem*.

### A Short Vort

*Akiva Zera (21)*

In this week's *parsha*, Elazar *Hakohen* teaches the Jews how to make the utensils which they won in battle *kosher*. The *possuk* says: " כל־דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־יבֹא בָאֵשׁ תַּעֲבִירוּ בָאֵשׁ וְטָהַר - Any article that can withstand fire—these you shall pass through fire and they shall be clean." There are two very valuable lessons that we can learn from these words.

The first is that if something goes in, it can come out. Rabbi Nachman said, "If you believe you can destroy, you have to believe that you can fix". One should always remember that their previous actions don't necessarily define them. We say every day in *davening* "*Elokai neshama shenasata bi tehora hi*" (My God, the soul which you have placed within me is pure). How can we say that the soul with which we woke up is pure? We would be lying if we were to tell *Hashem* that we have never done anything wrong. However, each morning *Hashem* forgives us, and purifies our soul anew. *Hashem* gives us a chance to start over each day, much like the pots became *kosher* even after being unusable for so long. Anything that can become impure can also become pure.

The second lesson is that just because something looks good on the outside, that does not mean it's good on the inside. The Jews saw what looked like great vessels, but in reality, they were completely non-*kosher*. There are two practical applications of this concept. One is that if we want to change, we must look internally, rather than trying to change how we appear to others. The other is that we can never judge someone based on appearances, since no matter how they may look, they can be completely different, for better or worse, on the inside. May we all be able to internalize and gain from the lessons of this *possuk*!

## The Hidden Greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu

*Samuel Gorman (21)*

The first of this week's two *parshiyos* begins with *Hashem* commanding Moshe to lead *Bnei Yisroel* into war against Midian, and Moshe subsequently relaying this commandment to the Jewish people. Although this sequence may at first glance appear to be quite a standard episode, there are two irregularities hidden within the text, each hinting at key personality traits of Moshe.

The first irregularity is the use of the word "*nekom* - you (singular) should avenge" (*Bamidbar* 31:2). This is an interesting choice of word. This commandment was intended to be communicated to the entirety of *Bnei Yisroel*, so why not write "*tinkemu* - you (plural) should avenge"?

The *Chizkuni* (*Bamidbar* 31:2, *d"h nekom nikmas*) points out that the singular language of the *possuk* seems to indicate that the commandment to take revenge on Midian was intended to be Moshe's responsibility alone. As the *Chizkuni* explains, this was problematic for Moshe, since he was indebted to the Midianites for providing him with refuge earlier in his life. How could Moshe, a man who, according to the *Ksav Vehakabala* (*Shemos* 7:20, *d"h Moshe v'Aharon*), would not even hit the Nile River because it saved him as a baby, take revenge on the Midianites, who were human beings? The *Chizkuni* answers that Moshe was not commanded to take revenge directly, but rather by acting as a supervisor, sending others in his place.

This seemingly peculiar word choice in the *possuk* demonstrates one of Moshe's many admirable qualities, namely, his *hakaras hatov* (gratitude). In this episode, Moshe is commanded to wage war against the Midianites, a people who had saved him many years before. Rather than attacking them himself, Moshe honors his debt to the Midianites by sending others to attack them in his place. By doing this, Moshe manages to fulfill *Hashem's* commandment while also honoring his debt to the Midianites.

The second irregularity within this episode is found when Moshe shares *Hashem's* commandment with the Jewish people (*Bamidbar* 31:3). For some reason, rather than repeating *Hashem's* commandment word for word, Moshe chooses to replace the words "*nikmas Bnei Yisroel* - revenge of the Jewish people" (*Bamidbar* 31:2), with the words "*nikmas Hashem* - revenge of Ha-

*shem*" (*Bamidbar* 31:3). Why did Moshe change the language, and how was he even *allowed* to alter a direct commandment from *Hashem*?

The *Ohr Hachaim* (*Bamidbar* 31:3, *d"h lases nikmas Hashem*) explains that Moshe did this for a tactical reason. If Moshe were to tell the Jewish people that they were fighting to avenge themselves, the war would not be a *mitzvah*. For this reason, Moshe decided to let *Bnei Yisroel* believe that they were fighting to avenge *Hashem*, thus making the war a *mitzvah* and ensuring greater protection from *Hashem*. The *Ohr Hachaim* continues by saying that Moshe's actions were perfectly acceptable, since he did send the Jewish people to war against the Midianites, in fulfillment of *Hashem's* commandment, and that *Hashem* intended for the words "*nikmas Bnei Yisroel*" to serve as an explanation for Moshe rather than as a part of His commandment.

Moshe's clever actions here once again demonstrate his greatness. We see from here that Moshe was always looking out for the Jewish people's best interest, as he worked to find a way to turn a regular war of revenge into a *mitzvah*, thus ensuring greater protection from *Hashem* and saving Jewish lives.

These small details within the text at the beginning of this week's *parsha* demonstrate the greatness of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. His unending *hakaras hatov* and his constant care for the Jewish people provides a great example for us all.

## Traded Tricks

*Moshe Singer (20)*

"Those who live by the sword," the clichéd expression goes, "die by it as well." What about those who live by other means of evil? What happens to those who live by the curse; do they die by the curse? Or do they die by the sword as well?

*Parshas Matos* tells us of the fate of Bila'am ben Be'or, the sole prophet of the foreign nations of the world, who was famed as such. In *Parshas Balak*, Bila'am was hired by Balak, the king of Moav, to curse the Jews, and only God's intervention prevented the Jewish people from succumbing to Bila'am's power. After his original scheme had failed, Bila'am devised a plot which would create a chink in our spiritual armor. He advised Balak to seduce *Klal Yisroel* to sin with Midianite women. The Jews unfortunately fell

prey to his plot, and the wrath of *Hashem* flared up, leading to the death of thousands of Jews in a terrible plague. Luckily, Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon, stepped up to save the day.

After such a success on the part of Bila'am, the Jewish people come for revenge in this week's *parsha*. Moshe amassed an army led by Pinchas, which struck the Midianites hard. The *Torah* tells us: "*They massed against Midian, as Hashem had commanded Moshe, and they killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian along with their slain ones – Evi, Rechem, Tzur, Chur, and Reva, the five kings of Midian; and Bila'am, son of Be'or, they slew with the sword.*" (*Bamidbar* 31:7-8).

This *possuk* raises an interesting question: Does it really make a difference how *Bnei Yisroel* killed Bila'am? All we need to know is that they killed him; why does it matter if it was by the sword as opposed to, say, drowning? Why exactly does the *Torah* choose to specify?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky *ztz"l* suggests a fascinating answer. Many *Rishonim* contrast the normal method in which Jews did battle with the way our Biblical nemesis Esav did battle. Where Esav fought with his sword, the Jews used their mouths to turn to *Hashem* in prayer. In this case, the roles seem reversed. Bila'am used his mouth, and we used the sword. Could there be a lesson in that as well?

World champion heavyweight boxer Joe Lewis had a career lasting over a decade, from the late 1930's to his retirement in 1949. As a black man, he endured racist abuse despite his status as a major sports hero. During his period of army service, he was driving with a fellow soldier when he was involved in a minor collision with a large truck. The truck driver got out and began yelling and swearing racial slurs at Louis, who just sat in the driver's seat smiling.

"Hey, you're Joe Lewis! You're not gonna let him get away with that! Why didn't you get out and knock him flat?" asked his buddy after the truck driver had moved on.

"Why should I?" replied Joe. "When somebody insulted Caruso (a famed opera singer), did he respond by singing an aria?"

Rashi explains the *Torah's* underlying aim in telling us how Bila'am was killed. Bila'am was a descendant of Esav, whose existence and mode of operation was decreed centuries before by his father Yitzchak, with the blessing "and by your

## 5 Minute Lomdus

*Shimi Kaufman (21)*

**Q.** The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 336:1) writes that a doctor who accidentally killed someone in the process of his work would be required to go into *galus* (exile), like anyone else who kills by accident. The *Gemara* (*Makkos* 8a) says that one who accidentally killed when hitting his son or *talmid* to rebuke them, or in the process of giving *malkos* (lashes) from *beis din*, is *patur* from exile. Abba Shaul learns this *halacha* from the fact that the *possuk's* standard case for an accidental murderer is a woodcutter; this teaches that the only cases where we assign *galus* are cases where the accidental murder was done in the process of something optional. Since the aforementioned actions are all *mitzvos*, one would not be held responsible for killing accidentally in those cases. If this is so, why should the *halacha* be any different by a doctor, since healing people is also a *mitzvah*? Why does a doctor receive *galus* for killing accidentally, but one giving *malkos* from *beis din* does not?

**A.** The exemption for those cases listed in the *Gemara* is not simply because those people were involved in a *mitzvah*. Rather, they are exempt because the killing happened in the midst of a *ma'aseh mitzvah* (action of a *mitzvah*). The very action which was meant to accomplish the *mitzvah* instead killed the person. Since the killing was done through a *mitzvah* action, the accidental murderer is not exiled. However, in the case of a doctor, no *ma'aseh mitzvah* was done; just the opposite, since the patient died! The doctor may have been attempting to do a *mitzvah*, but the stroke that killed the patient was itself not a stroke of healing. Therefore, a doctor who kills accidentally is exiled, whereas the people mentioned in the *Gemara* would not.

Source: *Mishmeres Chaim Chelek II, "Inyanim Shonim Biyoreh De'ah" 5*

sword you shall live" (*Bereishis* 27:40). Yaakov's weapon of choice throughout history also came from Yitzchak's words, "the voice is the voice of Yaakov." It is through Yaakov's mouth — through prayer, petition and persuading — that he was his strongest. Bila'am did not use his trademark weapon, the sword, against the Jews. Instead he attempted to cast a spell upon the Jewish people, Bila'am switched venues and used the mouth, the instrument of Yaakov.

And so, explains Rashi, as Bila'am exchanged his specialty for the *métier* of Israel, *Hashem* showed the world that we do not have to rely solely upon our weapons of choice. As Bila'am exchanged his

weapon, we, too, exchanged ours. In the world we live, people often encounter situations in which their “main modes of operation” aren’t necessarily suited to deal with. However, everyone needs to, and can, adapt, much like the example of Caruso. Your main trade isn’t always the key. In that climatic death of Bila’am, *Hashem* was showing us that even if the world tries to use our own weapons against us, we are still the people of God, and even if we need to use the weapons of the world, we can and will succeed. In order to survive, we need not only know the tricks of the trade, but also how to trade our tricks!

### Recounting and Reminiscing

*Yisroel Hochman (21)*

This week's second *parsha*, *Parshas Masei*, begins by recounting all the journeys of the Jewish people through the *midbar*, which total to forty-two. Why was it deemed necessary to have these journeys recorded at this point? Many different commentaries occupy themselves with trying to figure out the answer to this question. From the answers given by the various *meforshim*, we can learn an essential idea to our daily lives.

Rashi gives us two reasons why these *pesukim* were included in the *Torah*. The first reason comes from Rav Moshe *Hadarshan*, an eleventh century *rosh yeshiva* in southern France. He explains that these *pesukim* serve to show us *Hashem's* great love for his people. There are forty-two journeys recorded here, and twenty of them were spread out over the thirty-eight middle years in the *midbar*. (there were fourteen before the sin of the *meraglim*, which took place in the first year, and eight after Aharon's death, which was in the last year.) This is an average of one journey every two years! This served as a demonstration of *Hashem's* love for us, since he gave us so much time to rest in between the journeys.

Rashi's second explanation for the presence of these *pesukim* comes from the *Medrash Tanchuma*, which explains that this recounting can be compared to a king who took his ailing son all around his kingdom to try and heal him. At the end of their journey, he began to count the journeys, pointing out to his son “here we slept, here we felt cold, here you had a headache, etc.” Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch expounds on this second explanation, pointing out that in the second *possuk* in the *parsha*, the order of the words “encampment for the journeys” is reversed when the *possuk* dis-

cusses *Bnei Yisroel's* point of view. He explains that the reason for this is because there is a difference between *Hashem's* perception of the journeys and *Bnei Yisroel's* perception of the journeys. Whenever *Hashem* commanded the Jews to camp, His intention was for them to rise and attain a new goal or a new level in their *avodah*, at which point they would go and find a new encampment where they could further their growth. This meant that each encampment existed only for them to rise up to the level at which they could move on to the next leg of their journey. That is why *Hashem* called it “an encampment for the journeys”; *Hashem's* goal with the encampment was to allow *Bnei Yisroel* to move on to the next journey. *Bnei Yisroel* referred to them as “journeys for the encampments”, because they were always dissatisfied with their current location and looking towards the next journey, which would lead them to a better place. To them, it didn't matter where they would end up at their next resting spot, as long as they left where they were.

Rav Shimon Schwab takes this idea even further. He points out that the places listed here are places where *Bnei Yisroel* angered *Hashem*, and not the places in which they were inspired such as the *Yam Suf* or the first falling of the manna. The Ramban quotes the Rambam's *Moreh Nevuchim* (III:50) that all of these places were written so that future generations could take the same journey, and see the places where these famed stories occurred. They were recorded to strengthen the future generations belief that open miracles occurred daily in the *midbar*. It is possible to learn that Rav Schwab would say that the *Bnei Yisroel* did not fully appreciate the open miracles that *Hashem* performed, and therefore, like the *Midrash Rabbah* says, these were places where the *Bnei Yisroel* caused *Hashem* to get angry. They are places where *Bnei Yisroel* should have been inspired, but because they were never satisfied where they were, they were never able to appreciate the wonders in front of them. That is what caused *Hashem* to become angry at them at each location.

Rav Schwab continues in his explanation by rereading the various ailments given by the *Tanchuma* as examples. The father telling his son “here you slept”, is *Hashem* rebuking *Bnei Yisroel* for sleeping through the miracles and remaining oblivious to the wonders that surrounded them. The line “here you were cold” refers to the cooling of the fires of *emunah* that they should have felt when witnessing such amazing astonishing phenomena. The places where “their heads hurt” are the places where the leaders or “heads” of the nation passed away, such as *Har Hahor*, where Aharon passed away, and *Har*

*Nevo*, where Moshe would eventually pass on as well.

Perhaps we can suggest that the reason that *Bnei Yisroel* were missing out on the proper takeaways from all of these miracles is because, like Rav Hirsch said, they were always focused on where they were going next, instead of being present in the moment. We need to see the opportunities and wonders around us, not to take them for granted, and make sure that when we are looking back at our journeys, we do not see places where we caused *Hashem* to be angry, but rather places where we were able to grow to be worthy of the next part of our journeys.

### **Crimes of Passion**

*Shimi Kaufman (21)*

*Parshas Matos* begins with a discussion of the *halachos* of *nedarim*, vows a person takes which are considered binding in Jewish law. The second *possuk* of the *parsha* tells us “if a man takes a vow to *Hashem*, or takes an oath to prohibit something, he may not profane his words; whatever came out of his mouth, he must do” (*Bamidbar* 30:2). The *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 10a) points out that the *possuk* only prohibits the one who swore from profaning his existing vow. However, this *possuk* leaves room for others to remove his vow from existence, thereby not “violating” the vow, but still allowing the person to be removed from his obligation. This process is known as *hataras nedarim* (permitting of vows), and it is the only way for an ordinary person to get out of a *neder*. The truth is, the entire process of *hataras nedarim* is based on an incredibly flimsy premise; the Ramban refers to it as “hanging on a string as thin as a hair.” The *pesukim* do not explicitly mention a way to remove a *neder*, and if we were to look at these *pesukim* without Chazal, we would assume that a mistaken vow was intended to stay for eternity. What basis does this sweeping *heter* of *hataras nedarim* rest on?

The *Kli Yakar* explains the logical basis for this process based on the adjacent *pesukim*, which explicitly describe a special case in which a *neder* can be annulled. Under certain circumstances, if a woman makes a *neder*, her wife or husband can annul it, since we assume that her initial vow was dependent upon their consent. Thus, if they object to the content of her *neder*, it is retroactively made null and void. The same mechanisms which are at work here power the process of *hataras nedarim*. The way to annul a *neder* is to express regret before a *beis din* of three people, or before a *yachid mumcheh*, one expert in the *halachos*, who has the power of a *beis din*. Just as the woman’s *neder* is as-

sumed to have been taken initially with the assumption that she was only doing it with the consent of her husband or father, so too, anyone who takes a *neder* is assumed to have only been doing it within the parameters of *ratzon Hashem*, the Divine will, as represented by *beis din*. Thus, just as the *Torah* allows us to annul a woman’s *neder* based on this premise, we also have the right to uproot any *neder* which *beis din* deems fit.

Upon closer inspection, this explanation of the *Kli Yakar* seems to have fundamental issues. In practical *halacha*, the main factor which is needed in order to perform *hataras nedarim* is *charatah* (regret) by the one who took the *neder*. If the person seeking annulment regretted his initial commitment sufficiently, *beis din* can find grounds to remove his *neder*. According to the *Kli Yakar*, one would have expected the essential factor to be some sort of consensus on the part of the *beis din* as to whether or not the *neder* in question was beneficial to the litigant’s *avodas Hashem*! If the only reason we are allowed to be *matir* a *neder* is based on the fact that our *neder* must be in line with *beis din*’s standards, why would the deciding factor not be dependent on whether or not the *neder* in question measures up to those very standards?

The *mishna* (*Avos* 2:4) instructs us “*batel retzoncha mipnei retzono, kidei sheyivatel ratzon acheirim mipnei retzonecha*” -- nullify your will before His, so that the will of others will be nullified before your own. Our mission on this earth is to purify ourselves to the point where our will and the will of *Hashem* are synonymous. This is accomplished through study of *Torah*, diligent *tefillah*, and self-introspection through *sifrei mussar* and *sifrei machshavah*. A mistaken *neder* is the result of a moment of passion, one where we forget our values in the face of a particularly stirring event or speech. While these *nedarim* may be ostensibly positive, they do not reflect the carefully cultivated personality of the man of God. They may be “overly righteous” in one area while enabling leniency in another (as the saying goes, “every *chumrah* has a *kulah*”), or they may simply be too large of a step for where that person is spiritually. In any case, these vows are the products of momentary zeal, not calm consideration. When trying to rectify such a *neder*, it would not be helpful for the *beis din* to simply announce that the person’s vow is not reflective of the *ratzon Hashem*. While that may resolve the immediate *halachic* concern, the fact remains that there was a breach in this person’s character, one caused by an overabundance of passion without thinking if what they were doing was correct in the eyes of Heaven. In order to fix this mistake, the person who took the *neder* must express *charatah* for his brash decision. When the person in question is forced to perform *hataras nedarim* over and over to rectify his errors made during these moments of zeal, he will

slowly become more careful about what he says and does. The fundamental mechanism of *hataras nedarim* still relies on the fact that the person's calm and rational side would never have intended to take something upon themselves which was outside the parameters of *ratzon Hashem*. However, we force the person to express *charatah* for what they said after their moment of passion has passed, enabling them to remain in control next time they are tempted to make a *neder* inappropriately.

We should all merit to cultivate a personality which truly reflects Godliness, and to be able to maintain calm reflection in all areas of our lives!

### **When More is Less**

*Mordechai Flamenbaum ('19)*

The successful war against Midyan concludes with the victory march back to camp with the spoils and captives of war. Moshe and Elazar *Hakohen* come out to greet the victorious army led by Pinchas. The happy scene is marred by a puzzling event. Moshe becomes furious at the captains for not killing the women, instead taking them prisoner. The Ramban quotes a *Sifrei* which states that Pinchas responded to Moshe's accusation by saying "we did as we were commanded", implying that Moshe had not commanded them to kill the woman. In fact, an examination of the command to go to war shows that there was no specific command to kill the woman. The Ramban is extremely puzzled. If there was not explicit command to kill the women, why did Moshe get angry? The actions of the army are understandable; they were never commanded to kill the Midyanite women. And if they had truly been commanded to kill the women, why did Pinchas respond "we did as we were commanded"?

The *Chasam Sofer* suggests the following answer. We will first ask another question. *Hashem's* command to Moshe had been "take vengeance for *Bnei*

*Yisroel*". When Moshe instructs the army, he says "Arm men from among yourselves for the army that they may be against Midyan to inflict *Hashem's* vengeance against Midyan." Why did Moshe present the war as vengeance for *Hashem*, and not for *Bnei Yisroel*, as he had been commanded?

The *Chasam Sofer* explains that Moshe felt it was more appropriate to have the campaign propaganda say "God's Vengeance" as a form of honor to *Hashem*, even though the purpose was to attack in retaliation for the harm that was caused to *Bnei Yisroel* by the women of Midyan. However, by doing so, the army misunderstood the goal of the war. A war for God's vengeance made it appear as if the nation of Midyan had sinned against God in some way, and were therefore to be punished by *Bnei Yisroel* as His agents. Because of this, it was assumed that the men were the ones who had launched this unspecified affront to God, and were therefore the only ones to be punished, unless specified otherwise. However, the war was really vengeance for what was done to *Bnei Yisroel*, especially by the women. They also deserved to be killed for harming *Bnei Yisroel*, perhaps even more so than the men! Moshe thought that he had been understood, and got angry when his instructions were not followed. Pinchas and the army who misunderstood their task and thought they only had to kill the men responded "we did as we were commanded."

We clearly see the idea that sometimes, more is less. Moshe wanted to give honor to *Hashem* by calling it *Hashem's* war, but this really had the negative effect of causing the army to misunderstand their task. We must be careful when evaluating our actions. Every *chumra* (stringency) can lead to a *kulah* (leniency). For example, trying to enhance *tefillah* by davening *bitzibbur* can sometimes be a *kulah* in *pikuach nefesh* (risking someone's life). We must pay close attention to our plans to make sure they will have no bad "side effects". May we be able to always be able to judge correctly when less is really more, and when More is in fact Less.

### **Gedolim Glimpse: Rabbi Benzion Meir Chai Uziel**

*Meir Morell ('22)*

Rabbi Benzion Meir Chai Uziel (1880-1953) was born in Yerushalayim to a distinguished Rabbinic family. His father hired private tutors to complement his son's learning in *yeshiva* with language, grammar and literature. He lost his father at a young age. In 1900, at the age of twenty, he began to serve as Rabbi in Yerushalayim's *Yeshiva Gedolah*, and established the Yerushalayim Orphans School for the Sephardic community. He also established a *yeshiva* to train young Sephardim for the rabbinate. In 1911, he was elected Chief Rabbi of the Yafo community. In 1921, he was asked to serve in the Salonika community, which had seventy-thousand Jews. He remained there for two years' time, and, upon his return to Israel, was chosen to fill the position of Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Yafo. In 1939, he was elected Rishon LeTzion, and moved to Yerushalayim. In addition to his rabbinic activity, Chacham Uziel was a member of the National Committee, participated in the establishment of the Jewish Agency, and was the *Yishuv's* representative for the British regime, as well as a delegate to the Zionist Congress. He was party to all public affairs in Israel, as a public figure as well as a statesman, and was essentially the Jewish nation's representative for spiritual matters. Chacham Ben Zion Chai Uziel passed away on 24 Elul, 5713.

## Parsha Summary

The *parsha* begins by outlining the laws of *nedarim* and *shevuos* (vows), and how to annul them should the occasion arise. Moshe is then instructed to take revenge on Midyan for what they did to *Bnei Yisroel* in causing them to sin. In the battle, both Balak and Bila'am are killed. After the battle, the loot is divided up, and Moshe instructs the people about the relevant *halachos* of tahara and *kashrus* which are relevant to their spoils of war. Moshe is then approached by the *shevatim* of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe, who request to settle on the other side of the *Yarden*, in the captured lands of Sichon and Og. Moshe initially assumes that this was an attempt to escape the battle for conquest of the land, but after the members of the tribe agree to lead the charge into *Eretz Yisroel* proper, Moshe agrees. Moshe then instructs *Bnei Yisroel* regarding certain *halachos* pertaining to the land: he instructs the people to remove any corruption in the land, sets the borders of what constitutes *Eretz Yisroel*, and outlines the forty-eight cities designated for the *kohanim* and *levi'im*. The *parsha* concludes with the *halachos* of the *ir miklat*, the six cities of refuge which served as protection for people who unintentionally committed murder.

## Parsha Puzzles

Submit your answers to [shemakoleinu@yuhsb.org](mailto:shemakoleinu@yuhsb.org) along with your name and cell phone number to be entered into a raffle at the end of the summer!  
1 answer = 1 entry!

(Hint: Use the commentaries in the Mekraos Gedolos Chumashim, along with the Toldos Aharon on the side to find relevant Gemaras and Midrashim)

1. What *possuk* in this week's *parsha* is mentioned by the *Gemara* in reference to a special *halacha* regarding *shnayim mikra vi'echad targum*? What is the *halacha*?
2. Which two *trop* (cantillation marks) appear only once in the entire *Torah*, in this week's *Parsha*?
3. Why is Yair called a son of Menashe if he was not actually Menashe's son, or even a direct descendant (*Bamidbar* 32:41)?

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**שבת שלום!!!**

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