



Parshas Matos-Masei

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

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הגיליון מופיע באתר 'לדעת' וכן ניתן לקבלו לאימייל מדי שבוע על ידי שליחת בקשה. eisikovits1@gmail.com,

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Power of Speech More Powerful than the Stick / Learn From Our Experiences

Parshas **Matos Masei**

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Moshe Teaches the Roshei HaMatos A Lesson He Learned the Hard Way

I will be quoting two beautiful insights this week that I saw in the sefer Limudei Nissan by Rav Nissan Alpert.

Parshas Matos begins with *nedarim* [vows]. The parsha begins unusually. Most Torah sections dealing with halacha begin with the words "*Vayedaber Hashem el Moshe laymor*" [and Hashem spoke to Moshe saying...] However, this parsha begins with the words "*Vayedaber Moshe el roshei hamatos l'bnei Yisrael*

laymor..." [Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel saying...] [Bamidbar 30:2]. Certainly, Moshe heard these laws from the Master of the Universe. Still, the *pasuk* is written as if Moshe Rabbeinu himself was legislating these laws and passing them down to the leadership to teach the Children of Israel.

Secondly, the term “*roshei hamatos*” [heads of the tribes] is itself very unique. Usually, the Torah refers to these individuals as “princes” [*Nesiim*]. Every tribe had its *Nasi*. Why does the Torah refer to the *Nesiim* here as the “*Roshei Hamatos*?”

To answer this question, Rav Nissan Alpert cites an issue raised by the Rashbam in Parshas Chukas. Parshas Chukas contains the incident of *Mei Meriva*, in which, following the death of Miriam, the people lacked water. They complained to Moshe Rabbeinu, and Moshe, upon Divine direction, went to the rock. However, rather than speak to the rock, Moshe struck it. Because of that incident, Moshe and Aharon could not go into Eretz Yisrael.

The *pasuk* in Parshas Chukas says something strange in describing G-d’s instructions to Moshe. It says, “Take the staff and gather together the assembly, you and Aharon your brother, and you shall speak to the rock before their eyes, and it shall give its waters.” [Bamidbar 20:8]. Hashem told Moshe to take the staff and speak to the rock. Many of the commentaries, including the Rashbam, ask the question — if the Almighty’s intent all along was that Moshe speak to the rock, why does He begin his directive with the words “take the staff?” It is almost like the *Ribono shel Olam* is setting up Moshe Rabbeinu for failure!

The answer that Rav Nissan Alpert gives (which is not the answer the Rashbam gives) is that the Almighty was trying to give Moshe a message, which he did not recognize, until it was too late. After the sin of *Mei Meriva*, Moshe Rabbeinu retroactively understood what the Ribono shel Olam was trying to tell him and first realized the nature of his mistake.

The Ribono shel Olam was trying to teach Moshe Rabbeinu a lesson in how to deal with *Klal Yisrael*. It is possible to get people to do things in one of two ways: One way is to force, coerce, or beat them with a stick. The other way is to speak to and influence

through the power of words. The Almighty was trying to teach Moshe that the second way is preferable. This is akin to the commonly heard expression “the pen is mightier than the sword.” Yes, it is possible to get people to do things by the force of the sword, but the “pen” — ideas that convey convincing arguments can be mightier than the sword.

What is true of the “pen” is also true of the spoken word. Speech, too, can be mightier than the sword. Via the spoken word, a person can have tremendous influence on people. So, the Holy One Blessed be He told Moshe Rabbeinu “Take the staff...and speak to the rock” to teach Moshe a lesson: Yes, take the stick, but I want you to do something that is more powerful than using a stick — namely, speak to the rock!

After the fact, Moshe Rabbeinu realized his mistake. The *Ribono shel Olam* was not trying to trick him. He was teaching him a lesson that every leader needs to know. Every Rebbi needs to know this. Every Rav needs to know this. The lesson is that the stick is not necessary. A person should “speak to the rock.” The lesson that through speaking one can accomplish more than through physical force is a lesson Moshe Rabbeinu learned most painfully.

The parsha of *nedarim* is the Torah section that highlights the power of human speech. A Glatt kosher corn beef sandwich can meet the finest standards of kashrus preparation, but if someone makes a *neder* forbidding it to himself and then eats it — this is as big a transgression as eating pig. The Torah grants a person a tremendous power to effect a halachic imperative through his speech. Likewise, if I take an oath that I **will** eat a corned beef sandwich tomorrow and I fail to eat it, I have transgressed a *lav* (a negative Torah prohibition, i.e., “Do not”). This is the power of speech.

That is why the parsha begins with the words “And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes”. Who knew this lesson — about the power of speech — better than anyone else did?

Unfortunately, Moshe Rabbeinu learned the lesson the hard way by not adequately considering the power of speech (when he opted to strike the rock rather than speaking to it).

He spoke to the “*Roshei HaMatos*” — why does it say “*Roshei HaMatos*” and not “*Nesiim*?” It is because Matos has a dual meaning. Matos can mean tribes, and it can mean stick. Moshe Rabbeinu is telling these future leaders of the nation, “I am about to die. You will lead these people in the next generation. You can lead them with the power of the rod or the power of the tongue.” Moshe wants them to know that the power of speech is more effective than the power of the stick. Therefore, he addresses them as the “*Roshei HaMatos*,” indicating to them that although they have the power of the stick (*mateh*) they should try to influence the people by the power of speech, which is even more powerful than that of the stick.

The Lesson That Life Is A Journey — 42 Chapters

The second comment from Limudei Nissan comes from Parshas Massei.

The Torah lists the forty-two encampments that *Klal Yisrael* stopped at during their journey from Egypt into *Eretz Yisrael*. This information seems like irrelevant ancient history. It happened once, and it is never going to happen again. Yet the Torah spends a considerable amount of *pesukim* telling us every stop, utilizing the formula “They traveled from A and they encamped at B; and they traveled from B and encamped at C; and

so forth” cataloging 40 years and 42 stops of travels in the wilderness.

This seems superfluous, not needed, and irrelevant. This is, of course, impossible to say about *pesukim* in the Torah. No letter in the Torah is irrelevant. So, what is the lesson of the 42 encampments that the Torah is teaching us?

Many of the names of these stops call to mind less-than-stellar moments in the history of the Jewish people. For instance, the *pasuk* writes, “And they traveled from *Refidim* , and they encamped in the Wilderness of Sinai.” [Bamidbar 33:15] Why was that location called *Refidim*? Chazal say, “*she’Rafu yedeihem min haTorah*” (they failed to learn properly), and as a result, they were attacked by Amalek. This is not one of the more glorious moments in the history of *Klal Yisrael*.

“And they traveled from the Wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped at *Kivros Ha-Taavah*” [Bamidbar 33:16]. *Kivros Ha-Taavah* means the burial place of those who lusted. They complained about the food, and they were punished. There are several other places with similarly negative associations.

How do people look back on the less-than-glorious moments in their lives? Human beings tend to forget it and to wipe the slate clean. “I do not want to remember all those incidents and places where I tripped up.” The Torah says “No.” It is important to remember our past, even if that past includes incidents that do not make us proud.

The only way we will know how to be better in the future is to learn from our past. To paraphrase the American philosopher George Santayana “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” The reason the Torah catalogs the 42 encampments is to teach us: Yes, there were moments in your past in which you fell down, but you were able to bounce back from those moments.

Yes, there were moments in your history in which you did not act properly, but you were able to pull yourselves out by your strength of character. Those are important lessons that a person has to know. A person is the total of his experiences — good and bad. To have an attitude, “I just want to forget about the past,” is going to doom a person to failure again.

The Torah feels it is worthwhile to enumerate the 42 encampments to teach this lesson — that life is a journey. The journey is sometimes not a straight line — it has ups and downs, peaks and valleys. There are glorious moments and less than glorious moments. We should not erase any of them from our memory banks.

Whenever I read Parshas Massai and the enumeration of the 42 encampments, it reminds me of an incident that happened with me. Someone once asked me a *shaylah* [question seeking practical advice]. I do not know if I answered him properly, but based on Parshas Massai, this is what my thoughts:

I knew someone who had a child who had a very difficult time becoming engaged and married. This can be a very trying experience — for the parents and certainly for the young adults themselves. In the course of the several years that it took this person to become engaged; the person’s parents compiled a loose-leaf notebook of all the different suggestions for *shidduchim* that were proposed and considered over the years. The notebook was not as thick as a Chumash , but it was quite a thick compendium. The person said to himself that when his child finally becomes engaged, “I am going to burn this notebook.”

I do not know if they still do this today, but at one time, there was such a thing as a “mortgage burning ceremony” when a long-term mortgage was finally paid off. The borrower would be so thrilled to be finished with monthly payments on this 30-year mortgage that

he would physically burn the mortgage document, celebrating the fact that he now fully owns his home. This is how the parent felt — “When my child finally gets engaged, I’m going to burn this notebook!”

I told him that I was not sure that this was the correct Torah *hashkafa* [philosophy]. I told him that this experience was a journey in which there were ups and downs (probably mostly downs), but it was a journey that a person hopefully grew from. It is not something to destroy as if it never happened. This is the lesson of the 42 encampments. It would be much more efficient to say, “They left Egypt; they came to *Eretz Yisrael*; it took them 39 years, but they finally made it.” However, the Torah does not record it that way. The Torah writes about each of the stops and alludes to what happened at each of those stops. We recall the troubles they had at the various stops along the way, their defeats, and the way they behaved. All of this is important. These events made *Klal Yisrael*, and a person’s own history makes him. Therefore, I advised this parent that even though there were painful moments associated with this notebook, the chronicles of the trying period in which his child was trying to find their destined partner is nevertheless not something that should be burnt. They should be stored and be available so that, from time to time, it will be possible for both the child and the parent to say, “Look what I went through and look from where I have come.”

Ramban: Why was Parshas Nedarim given over specifically to

Parshas [Matos](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Our parsha begins with Moshe Rabbenu telling the Jewish people the laws of Nedarim. The beginning of the parsha is unique in that it begins with the words “Speak to the heads of the tribes saying...” Most of the Torah was either said directly to the children of Israel (Daber el bnei Yisroel) or it was said to the Kohanim (Emor el haKohanim). There is no other section that was given over specifically to the heads of the nation (Roshei haMatos). The early commentaries themselves were bothered by this question. The Ramban in his Chumash commentary suggests that Parshas Nedarim is something that should not be said over to the masses. The concept of taking oaths and vows is very stringent; and when people will hear that you can be “matir” a neder or a father or husband can be “mefir” a neder [halachic devices which permit the “undoing” of vow], they will come to take these matters lightly. Consequently, according to the Ramban, these laws were given only to the Roshei HaMatos, the leaders of the nation, who could be trusted to deal with these concepts with the level of sophistication and reverence that they deserve.

Alternate Opinion of the Chasam Sofer on the same question:

The Chasam Sofer, however, offers a different answer to this question. The Chasam Sofer suggests that the leaders of the nation had a special need to be aware of these laws. The Chasam Sofer quotes the story of the Shofet [Judge] Yiftach, who, in haste, made a vow to offer as a Korban to G-d the first thing that came to greet him when he returned victoriously from battle. The first thing that came to greet him was his daughter.

The Medrash in Bereishis Rabba asks why Yiftach did not go to Pinchas and have his vow “permitted” through the vehicle of “Hataras Nedarim”. The Medrash answers that Pinchas was waiting for Yiftach to come to him (he being the “Gadol haDor”) and Yiftach

was waiting for Pinchas to come to him (he being the chief political and military officer in the country). While each was trying to protect the honor of their own position, the life of the daughter was lost.

The Medrash says that both Yiftach and Pinchas were punished for this: Yiftach lost his life in a terrible disease where limbs started falling off one by one (as it says “he was buried in the cities (plural) of Gilead”), and Pinchas lost his ability to receive Ruach HaKodesh. The Chasam Sofer says this is perhaps why the Torah was particularly concerned that the leaders be extremely careful and well-versed in the laws of Nedarim.

Two observations are to be made on this teaching:

1. We cannot project our own petty midos on people of the stature of Pinchas and Yiftach. Yiftach was the leader of Israel during the time of Judges (Shoftim Chapter 11). Talmud says “Yiftach in his generation was like Samuel in his generation”. Pinchas was the grandson of Aharon the Kohen Gadol. He received the priesthood after killing Zimri (Bamidbar Chapter 25). He himself became the High Priest after the death of his father, Elazar. Although the Medrash does say that in this situation they were punished for their actions, we must never confuse our own petty shortcomings with those of people who were Gedolei Olam.

2. Many times, people do things because their Kavod [(personal) honor] was slighted. They do these things even though doing them is clearly to the detriment of both them and their own families. It is not unheard of for a person to sacrifice his own welfare or the welfare of his children on the altar of his ego. When a person's Kavod is affected, he can literally let his own children die.

We as human beings have a passion for kavod. The older we get, the more we have a tendency to be particular about our honor. A person needs an independent opinion to turn to — be it

his Rebbi, his Rav, his Rosh Yeshiva, or his good friend — who can open his eyes to his own blindness regarding matters of Kavod. Only an independent opinion can help prevent a person from leading himself to self-destructive action or inaction.

Annul and avoid

Written by Rabbi Danial Leeman

Under certain circumstances, a father has the ability to annul his daughter's vows. This is described as her father "heini" her [1]. The word "heini" is explained to mean withhold and also to give benefit [2], but these two ideas contradict one another! What then is the simple understanding of the word "heini"? [3]

When 40 employees from the Cantor Fitzgerald Company were fired, they sought out the advice of a Rabbi to verify what action they could take, but he told them that G-d has His reasons and there was no need to worry.

No doubt they were disheartened to say the least, and at a loss to understand these 'reasons'. Until the following Tuesday, that is, better known as 9/11, when 600 of their fellow employees perished in the infamous twin towers terror attack!

Our resolutions are often based on our own initial response to a situation and how we therefore perceive it should be dealt with, but without first seeking the proper advice.

Following these resolutions instead of seeking proper advice can cause a waste of time at best, and at worse a whole lot more. But on the other hand, a resolution is a resolution: our words are holy and should not be "profaned" [4]. It would therefore be a great benefit to us if the resolution were somehow annulled. Therefore, the proper annulling of a vow is indeed withholding (a person's resolution), but at the same time provides a great benefit for them!

Have a resolutely beneficial Shabbos,

Dan.

Additional sources:

[1] Bamidbar 30:6

[2] Rashi, Bamidbar 30:6

[3] See also Mizrachi and other commentaries to [2] [4] Bamidbar 30:3 and Rashi

A Chassidishe Vort

Written by Benjamin A Rose

“Lo Yachel Devaroi, K’Chol HaYotzai MiPicha Yaaseh”, do not profane your words; do as your mouth spoke.

The torah tells us that we must keep our word and not violate it. Rav Levi Yitzchok MiBerdichev in the Kedushas Levi makes a play on the words to explain how mortal people can perform miracles.

He reads the words as follows. If “Lo Yachel Devaroi”, you do not profane your words, then they will be holy and meaningful. Therefore, “K’Chol HaYotzai MiPicha Yaaseh” whatever comes out of your mouth will happen. This is the concept of “Tzadik Gozer, VHaKadosh Boruch Hu Mikayem”, a tzaddik decrees and Hashem make it happen.

He further explains that this why the Parsha is called Matos. Matos also means to turn (Netia). When a person watches his mouth, Hashem turns the Midas HaDin into Midas HaRachamim.

Never forget where your coming from

Written by d fine

As its name implies, Massei repeats the various journeys that Bnei Yisrael traversed in the desert. Why are these journeys repeated? Rashi (33:1) writes that this serves to highlight and revise HaShem’s chesed to us in that we were made to travel constantly – we camped at some places for long times rather

than staying only briefly in each place before setting off again. The Sforno adds that this enumeration of the journeys extols the merit of Klal Yisrael too, for it shows their willingness to have ‘followed’ HaShem out into the desert upon His command – completely relying on Him for their needs.

Humor

Demolition Tradition

The 100-year-old building that had served as a student residence for a certain yeshiva was about to be demolished. As the wrecker's ball began to strike, one of the students sensed some sadness by one of the yeshiva's rabbis standing nearby.

"This must be difficult to watch," the student said. "The tradition associated with that building, the memories of all the students who lived and studied there. I can't imagine how hard this must be for you."

"It's worse than that," the rabbi replied. "I forgot my cell phone in there."

DNA in Chelm

After 10 years, Chaim Yankel's wife Ruchel starts to think their kid looks kind of strange so she decides to do a DNA test at Chelm's new DNA lab. Ruchel finds out that the kid is actually from completely different parents.

"Chaim Yankel, I have something very serious to tell you," Ruchel says.

"What is it Ruchel?" Chaim Yankel answers.

"According to DNA test results, little Shloimie is not our child!"

"Well, you don't remember?" asked Chaim Yankel. "When we were leaving the hospital, you noticed that our baby had a dirty diaper. So you said, 'Please go change the baby, I'll wait for you here.' So I went inside, got a clean one, and left the dirty one there."

Don't Know Much About History

David Epstein was in his first semester in college and came home to spend some time with his parents over the winter break.

His mother Judy was very keen to know how his studies were going.

"Nu, how's your history paper coming along?" asked David's mother.

"Well, my history professor suggested I use the Internet for research and it's been extremely helpful."

"Really?" asked his mother.

"Oh yes. So far I've located 15 people who sell them."

Don't Forget the Ice Cream

Morty and Miriam Rosenberg, an elderly couple living in a Florida retirement community, were watching television one evening. Miriam said, "I am going to get a dish of ice cream now." Kindly, Morty offered to get the ice cream for his wife. "I'll write it down so you don't forget," Miriam said.

"I won't forget," the Morty said.

"But I want chocolate syrup and nuts on it, so I'll write it down," Miriam replied.

"I will get you the ice cream. Don't you worry," Morty replied.

A few minutes later, Morty returned with gefilte fish and herring. Miriam said, "See, I should have written it down because you forgot the kugel."