



In Kesher (Leibler Yavneh College's weekly newsletter) this week, I describe how walking through our school corridors on Tuesday morning, I was moved to hear our VCE students Davening Shacharit. As our return to Stage 3 restrictions has closed all places of worship, this must be one of the only (legal and therefore Halachically acceptable) Minyanim in Victoria.

When my Year 11 Motivated Gemara students arrived in the Beit Midrash, I impressed upon them how incredibly privileged they are to be able to Daven in a Minyan. In addition, I highlighted their responsibility, as one of the only Minyanim in town, to represent the entire Jewish community in their Tefillot.

While I am not contractually required to teach in Yavneh, I view it as a central and meaningful part of my role. The students in my class are not obligated to be there either, as they have opted into the motivated stream which requires them to take extra early lessons. When I arrived in Yavneh, the highest level of Gemara study at VCE level was not available to our female students, and it has been especially rewarding to see the amazing achievements of the VCE girls who have opted into the motivated stream, who I nickname the "B'not Tzlofchad".

Our Seudah Shlishit guest contributor this week is Noa Strum, a recent Yavneh alumna who is studying in Midreshet HaRova as part of Bnei Akiva's MTA program. As one of the B'not Tzlofchad of the motivated Gemara stream, and a namesake of one of Tzlofchad's daughters, it is most fitting that she has written about the two appearances of the daughters of Tzlofchad at the end of the book of Bemidbar.

I wish everybody a safe, healthy and enjoyable Shabbat.



A Tale of Two Cities

By chance and very good fortune, Rolene and I found ourselves in Sydney over this unfortunate lockdown period in Melbourne. Here there can be 20 people in a private home, so I could 'menachem aveil' to Rav David Blackman, who lost his mother, in the presence of a minyan. Sydney shuls are open for even larger numbers determined by the square metres of each

shul. Social distancing doesn't seem to concern people and the small number of kosher restaurants are well patronised.

Nevertheless, being a Melburnian raises some eyebrows! It's really unfortunate that a lockdown is required in Melbourne. We've pulled together really successfully in Mizrachi to-date. Im Yirtze HaShem, we will be back in shul in the future and please be reassured that given the right, we will make the Yamim Noraim special for all our members.

Last week, Rav Danny expressed the view that whatever decision the State of Israel makes about sovereignty is hers and her citizens alone. Of course I totally support that view and disdain those who've petitioned the Australian government to condemn Israel if it exercises its sovereignty over parts of Judea and Samaria.

Wishing you all a shabbat shalom from north of the Murray,

Danny Lamm



Rabbi Mirvis

"And Moshe told the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel as follows: This is the matter that Hashem commanded: When a man makes a vow to Hashem..." (Bemidbar 30:2-3).

This week's first Parsha of Matot opens with the laws relating to vows and oaths. Whether a person swears that they will do a certain thing or swears that they will not do a certain thing, they have a Halachic obligation to keep to their word.

As opposed to all other commandments in the Torah which are either communicated directly to the Israelites, through Moshe or through the Kohanim, this is the only case in the Torah where Moshe commands the Israelites through the leaders of the tribes. Why were the laws of vows specifically related in such a way?

I would like to suggest that the leaders of the tribes were specifically commanded about keeping to their word, because they were at greatest risk of transgressing this commandment.

Those in positions of leadership, wary of their popularity levels and the pressures on them to perform, are likely to make many commitments and policy statements. In the modern world of politics, it is not only common but expected that politicians will fail to meet their election pledges. Rather than being associated with governing for the good of the nation, the term "politics" has become a term to describe the actions of those who say one thing, mean another, and may end up doing something entirely different.

When we are commanded to keep to our pledges and teaching us the severity of going against our commitments, the heads of the tribes are given a specific warning. Those in leadership positions are not above the law and they are certainly not above morality. All people should take their commitments seriously, especially those in leadership positions and especially those who only gained those positions because of their commitments.

By promoting the values of trust and responsibility, may our political systems only be forces for good.



Reb Leor Broh

Riddle for Mattos:

We are not persons, animals or plants, but you'll find nine of us in one verse. What are we? And in which verse?

Riddle for Masei:

Find six consecutive verses containing verbs, all with the same root.

Answer to Last Week's Riddle (Pinchas):

Can you name 9 women who appear in Parshat Pinchas?

כזבי, שרח, יוכבד, מרים, מחלה, נעה, חגלה, מלכה, תרצה

Ref: 25:15, 26:46, 26:59, 27:1



Rav Yehoshua Asulin, Rosh Kollel

The Most Underrated Miracle

Many have dealt with why the Torah gives a detailed list of all journeys of Am Yisrael in the Desert. Particularly interesting is the Rambam's Answer quoted by the Ramban (33:1), who says that

although the miracles back then were evident to everyone who witnessed them, over time things would be forgotten and people will question the authenticity of the story of Exodus.

One of the most underrated miracles of Yetziat Mitzrayim is the fact that an entire nation of approximately 2 million people survived in the wilderness for 40 years. Not only that, but the places they stayed were far from civilization, they had no Coles or 7-Eleven to quench their thirst, and they relied completely on eating the manna and drinking water from the miraculous well that followed them.

Rav Hirsch (33:1) says that if one day we find remnants of a nation who lived in the wilderness so far from civilized population, just the view of that desert will surely strengthen our faith in the origin story of our nation. The very survival of a Nation for 40 years far from any natural source of food or water is a miracle not lesser than the Ten Plagues or the splitting of Yam-Suf. For that reason, it is key that the Torah tells us the exact places they went through.

However, to a critical thinker the problem remains, as we don't know where these places are, and they might have been near civilization which would eliminate the miraculous nature of that story. This is where the Abarbanel drops a bomb.

The Navi Micha (7:15) says: “כִּי־מִי יָצִאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֶרְאֶנּוּ נִפְלְאוֹת” – “As in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders”. The future redemption, says Abarbanel, will resemble the Exodus. Just like in Yetziat Mitzrayim Hashem led us through the desert and we survived and got to Eretz Yisrael, so too in the future redemption Hashem will exile us to the “מדבר העמים” – “desert of the nations”, and will redeem us from there.

At first glance it looks like an innocent Drasha that doesn't make a difference, but the truth is this is a complete game-changer.

“the desert of the nations” refers to the 2000 years of exile all over the world. Some of the countries are anything but a desert, they are rich and abundant with all living necessities and luxuries. Yet, the prophet says it's a desert, not literally – but metaphorically speaking.

A desert is a place where there's no food and water which are essential for the survival of the body. The “desert of the nations” is where there's no Torah, the spiritual food and water that's crucial for the survival of the soul and spirit. Just like no other nation has ever survived in the dessert for 40 years, no other nation has survived cut from its roots, scattered far away from its natural habitat for 2000 years – and came back to life in its homeland!

According to Abarbanel, even if we don't have strong evidence that the 40 years in the desert were a miracle as we don't know where those locations are, we can't deny the great miracle of 2000 years in a spiritual wilderness and yet – Am Yisrael is alive! This time we know all the places we were in exile and no one can deny the miracle. Who needs archaeological findings when Am Yisrael is a living fossil?

In Israel, the biblical land, lives a modern Jewish state with all its advancements, connecting past, present and future. Once more the journey of Am Yisrael is evidence to the divinity of its existence.

עם ישראל חי!



Rabbi James Kennard

The last section of the parasha of Mattot describes how the tribes of Reuven and Gad asked Moshe for permission to settle on the newly-conquered east side of the river Jordan, outside of the promised land itself, where there was suitable pasture for their extensive herds of cattle.

Moshe initially saw this request as the two tribes wishing to shirk their responsibility to the rest of the nation by absenting themselves from the battles yet to come, and would only agree to their proposal when he made it conditional on the tribes fighting alongside their brothers during the conquest of Israel.

When the Torah describes how he formalised the agreement with Reuven and Gad, suddenly a new element enters:

וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה לְבְנֵי גָד וְלְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן וְלַחֲצֵי שִׁבְט מְנַשֶּׁה בֶּן יוֹסֵף אֶת מַמְלַכְתּוֹת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי וְאֶת מַמְלַכְתּוֹת עֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן הָאֶרֶץ לְעַרְיָהּ בְּגִבְלֹת עַרְיָה הָאֶרֶץ סְבִיב.

Moshe gave to them, to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuven, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh the son of Yosef, the kingdom of Sichon king of the Emorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, according to its cities and borders, and the cities of the surrounding land. (Bemidbar 32:33)

The two tribes have become two and a half! Moshe unilaterally includes half of Menashe amongst those who will settle in Transjordan. Where did this come from?

The **Ibn Ezra** (12th century Spain) says, in typically laconic fashion, that Menashe was not mentioned before “because it was half a tribe”. So half of Menashe was there all along, but was not mentioned because it did not quite meet the “whole-tribe” criteria. This would imply that half of Menashe was there when the request was made, and was also bound by the condition of having to fight alongside the other tribes before it can claim its territory in the east, even though the Torah only records that Moshe made this arrangement with the two full tribes. This would fit well with the words in the book of Yehoshua, 1:12-14, which lists all two and half tribes being included in this conditional contract, with no distinction between the two tribes and their half-companion.

The **Meshech Chochma** (19th century Lithuania) suggests a contrary view regarding the conditional agreement and the half-tribe of Menashe. His view is that they were not included in the condition because their designated land had not yet been conquered. Indeed Bemidber 32:39-42, after the arrangement with the two tribes was concluded, describes how individual members of the tribe of Menashe captured the region of Gilad and other areas. Therefore, at the time that

half of Menashe was appended to Reuven and Gad, there was no actual territory to give to Menashe in a conditional way, and hence no condition was applied.

The **Ramban** (13th century Israel) suggests a “back story” to explain the sequence of events. When Moshe acceded to the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad to be given an inheritance in the eastern lands conquered from Sichon and Og, he realised that the extent of this area made it too large for just two tribes. He therefore asked for volunteers from other tribes to settle in this region and some of the families from Menashe came forward to accept the offer. The Ramban speculates that perhaps these families were major cattle farmers, and hence saw the benefit of the pasture-rich land just as the two original tribes had done.

Abarbanel (15th century Portugal) takes a similar approach, but enhances the Ramban’s view with some statistics. He cites a view that the conquered lands on the east of the Yarden were one fifth of the total area comprising Transjordan and Canaan. Therefore it was not reasonable to settle just two tribes there, being 17% of the total number of tribes, but the extra half-tribe brings this to 20.8% of the total, which is closer to the proportion of land being settled (i.e. 20%).

(The above calculations do not take into account of the actual populations in each tribe. If we use the numbers of males aged 20 and over provided in the census in Bemidbar 26, and assume that the half tribe of Menashe was exactly half of its population, then the two tribes on their own were 14% of the total, significantly less than the 20% proportion of the land, demonstrating even more starkly the need for Moshe to increase the population of Transjordan. With the addition of half of Menashe, that fraction reaches 18.4%, which is much closer to 20%.)

The **Hizkuni** (13th century France) gives a more homiletical reason for the inclusion of Menashe, and specifically why it was only half of that tribe. Menashe’s ancestor, Yosef, accused his brothers falsely of stealing his chalice, causing them to tear their clothes in grief. As a punishment, the tribe of Yosef’s descendent was also rent in two (based on Bereishit Raba 84:20)

Rav Soloveitchik (20th century United States) sees a very different reason for the splitting of the tribe.

“By including half the tribe of Menashe, Moshe was personifying his role as a leader whose primary objective is to unify his people and solidify them into a cohesive nation. By dividing the tribe of Menashe, half settling on the east bank of the Jordan together with the two tribes of Reuven and Gad, and the other half on the west bank in Eretz Yisrael proper, he was guaranteeing a link between the two sides of the Jordan. If one brother is on the east and the other is on the west, there would be constant communication between them. If a father is on one side and child on the other, there would be travel between them and concern for each other's welfare. This would enhance the unity between the twelve tribes and ensure the unity of Klal Yisrael”. (Halachic Positions, Vol. 5, pp. 35-36)

The **Netziv** (19th century, Russia) has a novel interpretation of the inclusion of half of Menashe with the other two tribes. He examines how this episode is re-told in Devarim 3:12-16.

(יב) וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת יִרְשׁוּנוּ בְּעֵת הַהוּא מֵעֵרֶעֶר אֲשֶׁר עַל נַחַל אַרְנֹן וְחֻצֵי הַר הַגִּלְעָד וְעָרֵיו נְתַתִּי לְרֵאשִׁיבֵי וְלַגְדִּי.
(יג) וַיִּתֵּר הַגִּלְעָד וְכָל הַבָּשָׁן מִמְּלֶכֶת עֹג נְתַתִּי לְחֻצֵי שִׁבְטֵי הַמְּנַשֶּׁה כָּל חֶבְלֵי הָאָרֶץ לְכָל הַבָּשָׁן הַהוּא יִקְרָא אֶרֶץ רְפָאִים.

(יד) יָאִיר בֶּן מְנַשֶּׁה לָקַח אֶת כָּל חֶבְלֵי אַרְגֹב עַד גְּבוּל הַגִּשּׁוּרִי וְהַמַּעֲכָתִי וַיִּקְרָא אֹתָם עַל שְׁמוֹ אֶת הַבָּשָׁן
 חֹזֵת יָאִיר עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.
 (טו) וַלְמַכִּיר נָתַתִּי אֶת הַגִּלְעָד.
 (טז) וְלִרְאוּבֵנִי וְלִגְדֵי נָתַתִּי מִן הַגִּלְעָד עַד נַחַל אַרְנֹן תּוֹךְ הַנַּחַל וְגַבְלֵי עַד יַבֵּק הַנַּחַל גְּבוּל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן.

(12) This land we took in possession at that time: from Aroer, which is by the valley of the Arnon, and half the hill country of Gilad, and its cities, I gave to the tribes of Reuven and Gad:

(13) and the rest of Gilad, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to the half-tribe of Menashe; all the region of Argob, all Bashan. The same is called the land of Rephaim.

(14) Yair the son of Menashe took all the region of Argov, to the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and called them, even Bashan, after his own name, Havvoth Yair, to this day.

(15) I gave Gilad to Machir.

(16) To the tribes of Reuven and Gad I gave from Gilad even to the valley of the Arnon, the middle of the valley, and its border, even to the river Yabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon;

The structure of these verses is perplexing. Moshe commences with the giving of the land to Reuven and Gad (v. 12), but then talks of giving Gilad to Menashe and prominent members of that tribe (v. 13-15) and only then does he complete the narrative regarding Reuven and Menashe (v. 16).

To add to the mystery; considering the regions listed in v. 13-15 we see that Moshe gave as much land to the half-tribe as he gave to the other two. Furthermore he did not include them in the condition as he did with Reuven and Gad. But this was not because of the members of the tribe of Menashe who conquered these areas (v. 14-15) just as Moshe did not give Yazer to its conquerors (see Bemidbar 21:32).

All these questions are answered with the following idea, consistent with the Netziv's general approach which puts Torah study at the centre of Jewish life and Jewish continuity. Moshe feared that the intensity of such study would be weaker in Transjordan, cut off from the rest of the nation (an idea found in the Midrash, Avot d'Rabbi Natan chapter 26) and therefore he placed there Torah luminaries and teachers (Machir, from the tribe of Menashe, is listed in Shoftim 5:14 as the ancestor of מְחַקְקִים - lawgivers). The large tribal inheritance was necessary to entice half of the tribe away from its designated home in Israel (also implied in the Talmud Yerushalmi, Bikurim 1:8, which states that the half-tribe did not take their land, but were given it).

The Torah inserts the story of Menashe's allocation right inside the description of the assignment of land to Reuven and Gad because the latter could not take place without the former. Reuven and Gad could not settle the land without Menashe by their side. Then, as now, Torah scholarship, schools and places of learning are integral and essential for the sustainability of any Jewish settlement.

This piece was completed on the night of תמוז כג, the 17th Yahrzeit of my father, Alan Kennard, אהרן יעקב בן יהודה ז"ל. Since I was unable to say Kaddish this year, may the Torah I learnt composing this essay, and that which may be learnt by its readers, be an elevation for the נשמה.



Noa Strum, Midreshet HaRova, MTA 2020

Revisiting the narrative of Bnot Tzelophchad

The conclusion of Parashat Matot-Masei and so of Sefer Bemidbar appears to end Bnei Israel's wanderings in the desert. It provides a concise summary of the events leading from Shmot 12 until this point and goes on to establish the allotted land holdings of the shevatim in Eretz Israel. The Parasha, seemingly unrelatedly, then proceeds to set out the implications of both intentional and unintentional murder. The parasha could, in fact, end there, neatly wrapping up the fourth book of the Torah on this emphatic moral note. However, Sefer Bemidbar ends in an ostensibly strange and unexciting way, by reintroducing the saga of Bnot Tzelofchad which was seemingly laid to rest in last week's parasha, Pinchas.

Bemidbar 27:4-7 (Parashat Pinchas)

לָמָּה יִגָּרַע שֵׁם-אֲבִינוּ מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֵּן תִּנְהַלְנוּ אֲחִיזָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אֲבִינוּ:

Let not our father's name be lost to his clan just because he had no son! Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!

וַיִּקְרַב מֹשֶׁה אֶת-מִשְׁפָּטָן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:

Moses brought their case before the Lord.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְקוֹק אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

And the Lord said to Moses,

כֹּן בְּנוֹת צִלְפֻחַד דְּבַרְתְּ נָתַן תִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֲחִזָּת נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אֲבִיהֶם וְהֵעֲבַרְתְּ אֶת-נַחֲלַת אֲבִיהֶן לָהֶן:

The plea of Tzelophchad's daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them.

Bemidbar 36:6-7 (Parashat Masei)

זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר-אָנֹכִי יְקוֹק לְבָנוֹת צִלְפֻחַד לֵאמֹר לְטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיהֶם תִּהְיֶינָה לְנָשִׁים אַךְ לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מִטָּה אֲבִיהֶם תִּהְיֶינָה לְנָשִׁים:

This is what the Lord has commanded concerning the daughters of Tzelophchad: They may marry anyone they wish, provided they marry into a clan of their father's tribe.

וְלֹא-תָסֵב נַחֲלָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמַּטֵּה אֶל-מַטֵּה כִּי אִישׁ בְּנַחֲלַת מַטֵּה אָבֹתָיו יִדְבְּקוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

No inheritance of the Israelites may pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelites must remain bound each to the ancestral portion of his tribe.

The story in Parashat Pinchas of Tzelophchad's five daughters - Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noa - encapsulates the importance of the rights of the individual. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes that Sefer Bemidbar is a book about the individual. It begins with a census of "lifting their heads" highlighting the significance of the individual in Bnei Israel. We then read of Moshe's personal despair, Miriam and Aaron's criticism of him, of Yehoshua and Calev, Zimri and Pinchas and others, and of Moshe's prayer to the "God of the spirits of all flesh" to appoint a successor who will relate to people "in their uniqueness and singularity". This is the context in which Bnot Tzelophchad are introduced, not only as women recognising inequality, but as individuals who understand and fight for their rights, which are affirmed by Hashem.

It is at the end of this week's double parasha, Parashat Matot-Masei, with the reintroduction of Bnot Tzelophchad, that the concept of communal responsibilities and associated rights becomes paramount. Rabbi David Bernat suggests that while our second encounter with Bnot Tzelophchad has the underlying previous concern that one may insist on "change by engaging Israelite traditions and thereby act on the rights of the individual, there is an obvious shift from individual to communal rights". Bnot Tzelophchad are thus restricted from marrying beyond shevet Menashe to ensure that the divinely prescribed land holding within a shevet will not be redistributed to another one upon marriage. Stressing the importance of land tenure, a matter concerning all shevatim, the conventional link between God and the land becomes the focal point, by speaking not of Divine presence in the land but His ownership of it.

In today's modern Western society, great emphasis is placed upon the rights of the individual. As primatologist Frans de Waal writes, almost the whole of today's Western culture is grounded in the notion of autonomous, selecting individuals. He goes on to suggest that, by nature, humans have strong bonds to family, neighbours, allies, co-religionists and people of the same ethnicity. We must be wary not to let our desire for individual rights override our consideration and inherent need for community. A balanced consideration of both "what am I deserving of" and "what benefits the society" is required for a well-rounded and functioning society. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes in Covenant and Conversation, Judaism is namely a system of "duties, not just of rights".

We can regard the complete two-part narrative of Bnot Tzelophchad as being fundamentally focused on opening the future for all women seeking to reclaim their Jewish inheritance in powerful ways, as well as the rights that apply to every shevet, of maintaining its territory, both being affirmed by God. Accordingly, we can now interpret the ending of Matot-Masei and face the conclusion of Sefer Bemidbar as no longer disjointed and misplaced, but rather nuanced with klal and perat, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks emphasises that we all have "rights as individuals but identities as member of tribes".