

QUESTIONS ON PARASHIOT MATOT-MASEI

Q-1. (a) Why are the laws of vows (1) discussed after *Parashat Pinchas*? (2) addressed to the tribal leaders? (b) How does a *neder* (vow) differ from a *shevua* (oath), and what is an example of each (2 views)? (c) In what 3 situations is it commendable to make a vow? (*Bamidbar* 30:2-15)

A-1. (a) (1) In describing the *korbanot* at the end of *Pinchas*, the *Torah* discusses vowing *korbanot* (29:39) – it now reviews secular vows; (2) *Hashem* did not want *Bnei Yisrael* to make vows frivolously – He “hid” the annulment laws from the people – the leaders would use them only when needed (*Ramban*). (b) (1) A *neder* restricts one from benefiting from an object, e.g., vowing to not eat a specific food – a *shevua* restricts one from acting, e.g., taking an oath to not sleep at night (*Nedarim* 2a). (2) A *neder* takes effect only on a substance, e.g., one cannot ban, with a *neder*, sleeping, which has no substance (*Nedarim* 14b) [note – this *neder* is not effective by *Torah* law, but it is *mi-derabanan*] – he can make a *shevua* he will not sleep (*Nedarim* 15b). (c) To strengthen one’s resolve (1) not to sin; (2) to do a *mitzva*; (3) in times of distress (*R. Bechaya*).

Q-2. (a) Why does *Hashem*’s command to fight *Midyan* follow the *nedarim* laws? (b) (1) Why did *Moshe* tell *Bnei Yisrael* to “inflict vengeance ‘for *Hashem*’ on *Midyan*” after *Hashem* told *Moshe*, “take vengeance ‘for *Bnei Yisrael*’ against the *Midyanim*”? (2) Since *Hashem* commanded *Moshe*, “*nekome*” (take vengeance [against the *Midyanim*]), in the singular, why did *Moshe* not lead the battle himself? (3) Why did *Moshe* send *Pinchas haKohen*, not *Kohen Gadol Elazar* to battle the *Midyanim* (3 views)? (c) How did the *Midyani* cities’ siege differ from that of the *Emori* cities? (d) Why did *Bnei Yisrael* kill *Bilam* “*be-cherav*” (with a sword)? (e) Why was *Moshe* angry with the army commanders and not with the soldiers who let the *Midyani* women live? (f) (1) Why did *Elazar*, not *Moshe*, teach the laws of *kashering* utensils (3 views)? (2) Why were these laws explained now, not after the previous battles against *Sichon*’s and *Og*’s armies? (g) When dividing the spoils captured from *Midyan*, why did the soldiers give (1) 1/50th to the *levi'im* and (2) 1/500th to *Elazar*? (*Bamidbar* 31:2-14,21-30)

A-2. (a) *Hashem* told *Moshe* he would die after the *Midyan* battle – if he thought that His oath that he not enter the land could be annulled, He showed that unlike man, His oaths are irrevocable (*R. Bechaya*). (b) (1) It showed that standing against *Bnei Yisrael* is like standing against *Hashem* – vengeance for Him is like vengeance for them (*Rashi*). (2) He could not directly battle the *Midyanim* with whom he had lived, benefitted from their hospitality and married a *Midyanit* – one may not “throw stones into a well from which he had drunk” (*Medrash Tanchuma*). (3) (i) *Pinchas* started the *mitzva* to destroy the *Midyanim* by killing *Cosby* – it was fitting for him to finish the *mitzva*; (ii) *Pinchas*’ mother was *Yosef*’s offspring – it was fitting that he avenge the *Midyanim*, who sold *Yosef* to *Mitzrayim*; (iii) *Pinchas*, per *Sotah* 43a, was the specially designated *kohen mashu'ach milchama* (the *kohen* anointed for war) (*Rashi*). (c) *Midyan* was not one of the 7 *Cana'ani* nations to be completely destroyed – *Midyani* cities were besieged on 3 sides, with an escape route for those fleeing (*Rambam* – *Hilchot Melachim* 6:7). (d) *Bnei Yisrael*’s strength is words and prayer – *Eisav*’s power is with the sword – since *Bilam* tried to destroy *Bnei Yisrael* with *Bnei Yisrael*’s weapon of words, *Bnei Yisrael* used *Eisav*’s weapon against *Bilam* (*Rashi*). (e) Leaders are responsible for their subordinates’ wrongdoings (*Rashi*). (f) (1) (i) *Moshe*’s anger with the commanders for keeping the *Midyani* women alive caused him to forget these laws (*Abarbanel*). (ii) *Elazar* erred – *Moshe* or *Yehoshua* should have explained these laws (*Bamidbar Raba*). (iii) *Moshe* addressed the commanders who did not have the booty – *Elazar* saw the warriors with the utensils and taught them the laws (*Ba'al haTurim*). (2) During the conquest of *Eretz Yisrael*, *Bnei Yisrael* were allowed to eat non-*kosher* food (*Chulin* 17a) and could use non-*kosher* utensils – for the war against *Midyan*, which was *Chutz la'Aretz*, non-*kosher* utensils were banned (*R. Bechaya*). (g) (1) The army fighting *Midyan* had 12,000 men, 1/50th of *Bnei Yisrael*’s 600,000 men – they gave the *levi'im* this percent of the booty; (2) *kohanim* get *ma'aser* (1/10th) of that which is given to the *levi'im* – *Elazar* got 1/500th (*Abarbanel*).

Q-3. (a) When the 2 *shevatim* approached *Moshe*, why does the *Torah* (1) mention *Gad* before *Reuvein* (3 views)? (2) say “*va-yomer*” ([*Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuvein*] “said”) in the singular? (b) Why did *Moshe* give a portion of *Eiver haYarden* to half of *Menashe*, who did not ask to live there (2 reasons)? (c) Why did *Gad* and *Reuvein* use the word “*nachnu*” for “we,” not the usual “*anachnu*”? (*Bamidbar* 32:2,25-33)

A-3. (a) (1) (i) *Gad*, with more herds than *Reuvein*, had a greater desire for fertile *Eiver haYarden* land; (ii) their enormous herds made *Gad* wealthy, becoming bold and haughty – they jumped in first (*Kli Yakar*). (iii) With the best army, *Gad* was least afraid to be isolated from *Bnei Yisrael* in *Eiver haYarden*; (2) they answered in unison, as one man (*Rashi*). (b)(1) Since *Eiver haYarden* was too large for the 2 tribes, *Moshe* asked for volunteers to join *Reuvein* and *Gad* – 2 of *Sheivet Menashe*’s 8 paternal families (1/10th of *Menashe*’s population) agreed (*Ramban*). (2) Since *Menashe* had frightened the 10 brothers in *Mitzrayim* and caused them to rend their clothes in two, *Hashem* caused the land of *Menashe*’s offspring to be split in two (*Medrash Yelamdeinu*). (c) “*Nachnu*” was used by *Yosef*’s brothers (*Bereishit* 42:11) to tell him that they had come to find their missing brother and were willing to fight to the death for his release – *Gad* and *Reuvein* were telling *Moshe* that they were willing to fight with the other tribes, even at the risk of death (*Peirush haRoke'ach*).

Q-4. (a) Why does the *Torah* list the 42 *masa'ot* (places at which *Bnei Yisrael* camped) in the *midbar* (3 views)? (b) At which place did they camp the longest? (c) (1) Why does the *Torah* tell us *Aharon* died on 1 Av? (2) *Yevamot* 43b says, "From *Rosh Chodesh* [Av] until the fast [of *Tisha B'Av*], people refrain from commerce" – why do we not reduce our business activity during the Nine Days (2 views)? (*Bamidbar* 33:1-49)

A-4. (a) (1) These uninhabitable locations lacking water and plant life show that *Hashem* miraculously led millions for 40 years through the *midbar* (*Ramban*). (2) Future generations might think that *Bnei Yisrael* travelled, like present-day Arabs, near cultivated lands – listing these places rebuts this (*Rambam – Moreh Nevuchim*). (3) *Hashem* caused *Bnei Yisrael* to camp in certain places to cure spiritual and moral illnesses of *galut Mitzrayim* (*R. Bechaya*). (b) 19 years at *Kadeish*; (c) (1) Each year on *Tisha B'Av*, about 15,000 died due to the *meraglim's* sin, but after *Aharon's* death in the 40th year, no one died on *Tisha B'Av*, since a *tzadik's* death atones for *Bnei Yisrael's* sins (*Eicha Rabati*). (2) (i) Most interpret the *Gemara* to mean that only business activity for joy (such as wedding needs) is banned, but not regular commerce (*Beit Yosef*). (ii) To pay the [gentile] governments' taxes, we have to engage in normal business activity, like on *Chol haMoed* (*Taz*).

Q-5. (a) Why did *Hashem* tell *Moshe* *Eretz Yisrael's* boundaries? (b) When listing the representatives of the *shevatim* in apportioning *Cana'an*, why are those from the following 3 *shevatim* not called "*nasi*" (leader) – (1) *Yehuda*? (2) *Shimon*? (3) *Binyamin*? (*Bamidbar* 34:2,17-26)

A-5. (a) Knowing *Eretz Yisrael's* exact borders were essential – certain *mitzvot* are fulfilled only within them, e.g., *shemita*, *teruma*, *ma'aser* and *bikkurim* (*Rashi*). (b) (1) *Yehuda's* leader was *Calev*, previously called "*nasi*" (13:2); (2) *Shimon* did not receive separate territory – they lived in *Yehuda's* portion – its representative did not have to be a *nasi*; (3) *Binyamin's nasi* was *Elidad ben Kislion*, whom *Medrash Tanchuma* identifies as the *navi Eldad* – to identify him as a *nasi* would lower his *navi* status (*Rabbeinu Nisim*).

Q-6. (a) Why did *Hashem* choose the *Kohen Gadol's* death to end murderers' *ir miklat* exiles (4 reasons)? (b) (1) Why may people who saw one committing a murder not execute him without a *beit din* trial? (2) When can one execute someone without a *beit din* trial? (3) How do we know that a case involving capital punishment must be judged before a *beit din* of 23 judges? (*Bamidbar* 35:6,24-25)

A-6. (a) (1) The *Kohen Gadol* davened on *Yom Kippur* that *Bnei Yisrael* not do idolatry, immorality and murder – a murder showed an imperfect *tefila* – *mida ke-neged mida*, the murderer prayed for release when the *Kohen Gadol* died (*Targum Yonatan*). (2) A *tzadik's* (the *Kohen Gadol's*) death atones for the murderer's sin; (3) his death caused national mourning, soothing the blood redeemer's grief (*Abarbanel*). (4) Only *Hashem* knows the deserved penalty – He timed the *Kohen Gadol's* death to give the fitting *ir miklat* sentence (*Sforno*). (b) (1) Capital punishment was a final resort for one who deserved it – he was brought to a *beit din* that sought a possible way to spare him from death - one was executed when there was no merit to acquit; (2) if one pursued another (*rodeif*) to kill him, was warned to stop but persisted, he was killed to prevent the murder (*Sefer haChinuch – Mitzvah* 409). (3) The *Torah* says, "the *eida* (assembly) shall judge ...the *eida* shall rescue" – "*eida*", from the *meraglim*, mean 10 – there should 10 looking to convict and 10 to acquit, plus 3 more to assure a majority of at least 2 (*Rambam – Hilchot Sanhedrin* 5:3).

Q-7. In the *haftara*, when the *navi* says to *Bnei Yisrael*, "I [*Hashem*] planted you [*Bnei Yisrael*] a *shorek* (noble vine) full of true seed" that transformed into a degenerate, alien vine, to what does *shorek* refer (3 explanations)? (*Yirmiyahu* 2:21)

A-7. (a) *Shorek* is the branches of a good vine – *Bnei Yisrael*, with pious and righteous fathers, deteriorated; (b) *shorek's gematria* is 606 – while *Hashem* added 606 *mitzvot* to the 7 *mitzvot* *Bnei Noach*, *Bnei Yisrael* still degenerated (*Rashi*). (c) The *shorek* (choicest of vines) represents *Avraham* – how did the best vine of the true seed [*Avraham*] produce the bad branches of a strange vine [*Bnei Yisrael*]? (*Radak*).