

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Herman and Sherry Berlin, in memory of Herman's mother, Rose Berlin, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 14th of Tammuz, and his father, Alvin Berlin, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 18th of Tammuz.
- Howard and Shirley Blumenfeld, in memory of Shirley's father, Yitzchak Goldman, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 24th of Tammuz.
- Mordechai and Miriam Gordon, in memory of Miriam's father, Harold Frost, Chaim ben Eliyahu, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 28th of Tammuz.
- Murray and Baila Jacobson, in memory of Baila's mother, Clara Labovitz, Chaya bas Shraga Feivel, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 25th of Tammuz.
- Nachy Rochkind, in honor of Aryeh and Sandy Guttenberg and Marvin and Linda Diamond.
- Mendy and Peshie Vim, in memory of Mendy's father, Chonon Vim, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 3rd of Av.

May all the *neshamos* have an *aliya* and may the sponsors and honorees be rewarded with *bracha* and *hatzlacha* and good health.

Towards the end of the Jewish people's travels in the Midbar, Moshe Rabbeinu instructs them about promises and vows. He stresses the importance of keeping one's word **לא יחל דברו ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה** *Do not profane your word, whatever comes out of your mouth, you must keep...*

The **Shel'a** notes an apparent redundancy. The Torah says **both** לא יחל דברו, a person may not allow his words to become profaned by leaving them unfulfilled, and then it says ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה, he must do what he said.

של"ה פרשת מטות דרך חיים תוכחת מוסר: ד. 'לא יחל דברו ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה' (במדבר ל, ג). לכאורה 'ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה' הוא מיותר. אלא הוא תוכחת מוסר שהאדם יהיה נאמן בדיבורו וישמור מוצא שפתיו, אף שלא היה בדרך נדר ולא היה מחוייב בדבריו. כענין שאמר משה רבינו ע"ה לבני גד וראובן (שם לב, כד) 'והיצא מפיכם תעשו', פירש רש"י שקבלתם עליכם

The **Shel'a** writes that, through this apparent redundancy, the Torah goes out of its way to stress the importance and necessity of fulfilling **all** our commitments—even if they do not technically qualify as *shevuos* or *nedarim*, as promises or vows. Sometimes we say to ourselves “*But I never said I promised,*” thinking we are not bound by our words; but the Torah teaches, ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה --a word is **always** a commitment. Words are extremely powerful. They are holy.

במדבר פרק ל (ב) וידבר משה אל ראשי המטות לבני ישראל לאמר זה הדבר אשר צוה ה': (ג) איש כי ידר נדר לה' או השבע שבעה לאסר אסר על נפשו לא יחל דברו ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה:

And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael saying: This is the word that God has commanded. If a man makes a vow to God or swears an oath, or takes a vow upon himself, he must not permit his words to remain unfulfilled; he shall do whatever has come forth from his mouth.

Why is keeping your word so important that Moshe taught these laws to the **community leaders**? Unfortunately, we have become accustomed to politicians and other leaders who do not keep their word. But the Torah's message is that leaders—specifically--**must** model this attribute of keeping their word because there is nothing more important than that. says **Rabbeinu Yonah** in Shaarei Teshuva—it is fundamental to life itself. Perhaps this was the reason Moshe was told to **speak** to the rock at Mei Meriva, in order to extract water from it, and why he received the harsh punishment of not being allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael, when he failed to do as directed. He was instructed to speak to the rock, to demonstrate the power of speech--**the** tool they needed for their survival at the time and for Jewish survival into the future. It explains why Moshe Rabbeinu gathered the community's leaders to teach them this lesson now, before entering Eretz Yisrael.

But why now? Why teach them this message as they prepare to enter Eretz Yisrael?

I think there is a lesson to be learned. After 40 years of wandering through the wilderness, Bnei Yisrael arrive at Arvos Moav, the Plains of Moav. The Promised Land is so close; they can see it and can almost taste it. Indeed, most of Parshas Masei is devoted to describing what awaits them on the other side of the Jordan River. This is the final stage of the promised redemption from Egypt—**והבאתי אתכם אל הארץ** the Jews will be given their own land—the Land of Israel. We would think that the focus of the Torah should now be exclusively on what lies ahead and what is in store for the Jewish people.

Yet while looking **forward** towards the settling the land of Israel, Parshas Masei opens with a significant look **backward**:

במדבר פרק לג (א) אלה מסעי בני ישראל אל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאתם ביד משה ואהרן:

"These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who went forth out of the land of Egypt," followed by a detailed listing the places they stopped in the wilderness (Bamidbar, 33:1-49)

What is the point of this travelogue? Why look back now? Wasn't the underlying issue--with all the complaints and the lack of trust in Hashem that caused the sin of the Meraglim—that they were a people stuck in their past, a people with a slave mentality, feelings of deep inadequacy; a nation unable to get over their past and move forward?

To begin answering these questions, let's consider for a moment what it would mean if the list of 42 stops were not included, and if all those years would had been covered by a single *Pasuk* that read: "They left Egypt and 38 years later they arrived at the border of Israel..." The message would have been that all those years of meandering in the desert were a black hole; they had no value, it is not worth contemplating those years. It would thus be designated a period of wandering without direction or destination, of killing time until the older generation died out. All the personal and national trials and tribulations, the challenges and successes, the happy occasions would be just a blur in their history. Better forgotten than remembered...

By remembering the 42 travels, the Torah is teaching the Jewish people a critical life lesson-- **before moving forward, it is important to take time to look back**. Hashem is reminding them that before they proceed on the next leg of their journey, they must remember what occurred before, and recall where they have been. Naming the places you have been turns events into milestones and transforms wandering into a journey. Naming those places and thinking about where you have been helps you learn from the past. In terms of our national history, we would probably like to forget about much of it-- the pogroms, the exiles, the genocide and humiliation that have followed us for thousands of years. But we must not forget it. We may not always be able to articulate exactly the value of arriving at certain stops along the way, but that does not diminish their significance. Indeed, the Torah itself simply names most of the places where the Jews traveled, giving no indication of their significance. This is because their significance may not have been fully understood or easily articulated at the time.

The *Pasuk* states that Moshe wrote down their journeys according to the word of God.

במדבר פרק לג ב) ויכתב משה את מוצאייהם למסעיהם עליפי ה'...

If we can at least record and remember the milestones during our own life's journey, as individuals and as a nation, then we will have accomplished a lot. Our hardships and struggles will become life lessons and periods of growth. By writing down these events, we declare that they are of lasting value, that we can transform all of these difficult journeys into an integral part of our lives.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his approbation to Chanoch Teller's book *Heroic Children*, about survivors of the Holocaust, writes: "*We cannot change the past; but by remembering it, we can change the future.*" The same was true of the Jewish people and their journey in the desert. **There was not only real significance in the destination, but there was significance in the journey as well; in all the lessons learned along the way.**

The **Lubavitcher Rebbe**, zt"l, points out that the Torah refers to these 42 journeys in the desert as all part of their leaving Egypt. אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים. He raises the obvious difficulty: once they completed the first of the 42 journeys—weren't they out of Egypt! Why categorize all 42 journeys as part of leaving Egypt?

His answer is that leaving Egypt was not only about leaving the geographical place called Egypt. The Jews needed to remove Egypt from within themselves as well—the culture, the ethics, the corrupt moral codes, the polytheistic beliefs. Until that was done, they were still, to some extent, living in Egypt; Egypt was part of them wherever they went.

That is why they were able, mere weeks after the revelation, to worship a golden calf. That is why they were filled with doubt about conquering the land of Israel. That is why they cried about petty things and doubted their leadership, their God, and one another in the desert.

They brought Egypt along with them to the desert.

And similarly, their final destination was not only the land of Israel, geographically. Their goal was to arrive there as a unified nation, full of faith, who would be able to connect to the special land that is Israel, and stay there. Because Israel is not simply a land one conquers, it is much deeper than that—it is the Land God favors and watches, and a land with certain spiritual expectations. Until they had internalized the message of Israel, they could not reach their destination.

The 42 journeys in the Midbar were about making that happen—building them up as a unified nation of faith—who would be able to leave Egypt, or more precisely, have Egypt leave them, and enter Israel, or more precisely, have Israel become part of who they are.

The **Magen Avraham** cites the sefer **Tzror Hamor** that we must read the 42 journeys in one *Aliya*—to show that they were all part of one process—leaving Mitzrayim and entering eretz Yisrael. **There was one overarching lesson to be learned.**

What is that fundamental lesson of all the journeys? The lesson they needed to learn before entering Eretz Yisrael? The power of words.

The **Ohr Hachaim** cites the **Zohar** that the letters of the word Midbar, if rearranged, spells midaber, because it was in the desert, in many of their stops, that the Jewish people struggled to learn the importance of proper speech.

אור החיים במדבר פרק כד: או יתבאר לשון דיבור כדרך שפירש בזהר (ח"ג רה ב) בפסוק אבינו מת במדבר לשון דיבור, והכוונה לפי שכל העשר נסיונות שניסו ישראל את המקום היו בדיבור, על ים סוף, בעגל, במתאוננים, במרגלים, בעדת קרח, מי מריבה וכו' כולם היו חוטאים בדיבור, וחשב כי בכללות ישראל שהיו לנגד פניו ימצאון רבים מכתות המדברים ודרך שם יקלל:

Among other episodes along the 42 stops, this was highlighted by the incident of the **Meraglim**, the spies who spoke negatively about the Jewish people's ability to conquer Israel, and the **Misonenim**, the Jews who complained in the desert about the food, as well as **Korach's** rebellion. These three incidents all showed that words can negatively shape the perception of a whole nation. The doubt created by the spies regarding the virtues of Israel and about their ability to conquer the land has haunted us for thousands of years. The potential curse of **Bilaam** shows us both the power of self-doubt created by a negative message and the power of optimism created by a positive message. His eventual blessing ישראל טובו אהליך יעקב משכנותיך ישראל has inspired us for thousands of years. Words create real attitudes, and they can create and shape the future.

The lesson of their travels and struggles in the Midbar is about the power of words. The **Sfas Emes** writes that the Jewish people's strength, our secret weapon, is in our ability to use our mouths—to pray, to learn, to commit to transform ourselves, and to support and encourage one another.

שפת אמת במדבר פרשת מטות: לא יחל דברו ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה. כי כחן של ישראל רק בפיהם כי כתיב ויפח באפיו נשמת (רוח) חיים. ולכן בכח האדם ע"י דברי תורה שמוציא מפיו להטות עצמו אליו ית'. ולכן מצוה לקרות שמע בכל יום ב"פ וכן שאר ברכות ותפלות שתקנו חז"ל.

They were rescued from Mitzrayim because they cried out to Hashem—with their words. In the Midbar, they learned about this powerful tool called speech; its ability to destroy—to tear people apart through *lashon hara* and *machlokes*—harmful, hurtful words; and its ability to repair and create—and transform an individual—through true commitment and *tefilla*—into a spiritual being. They learned how to support one another with kind words, and encouraging words—as Moshe did time and time again.

The Torah records “*Vayevaseir Yaakov levado*,” that Yaakov remained alone, with no one else with him. “*Vayeaveik ish imo*,” and because of this, Esav's angel was able to attack him. This symbolizes that when a person is alone, he is more vulnerable. But when he feels the support and embrace of friends, he is strengthened to overcome the challenges that come his way. It reminds us how important it is that, as travelers through the journey of life, we band together and are *mechazeik* each other.

And as the **Sfas Emes** adds, there is a secret ingredient to speech. By keeping our words—being true to what we say, our commitments to others, our pledges to *tzedakah*, our commitments to *daven* with a *minyan* or to invest in learning, and in so many other ways, we can bring God's favorable response.

וכפי מה שהאדם שומר פיו כן זוכה שכל היוצא מפיו יעשה שיועיל לו הקבלה והתפלה בפיו שיהי' כן:

God responds accordingly and will grant our wishes and tefillos.

דרך שיחה (הגר"ח קניבסקי) ח"א עמ' תנ"ד

לא יחל דברו ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה. הביא הרב בס' ארחות יושר (דף ו' ע"ב) מספר חסידים שאם ישמור האדם את פיו מדיבורים אסורים ולא יחל דברו, אזי כל אשר יבקש מהשי"ת יתקבל. וכן הובא מהחיד"א על פסוק זה.

Our journey in *galus* has been long, and it continues to be difficult. In this challenging time, we can draw comfort by remembering that, just as the long journey of the Midbar ended with the Jews conquering Eretz Yisrael and building the Beis Hamikdash, our longer journey of *galus*, with all the trials and tribulations will eventually have a good ending in store. But we must learn that crucial lesson of the Midbar, the power of our words, and use them for *Torah*, *tefilla*, and *chessed*.

May Hashem give us the strength to continue through this exile, and may He continue to protect all Klal Yisrael, and may we merit to see the Beis Hamikdash rebuilt speedily in our day...amen.