

Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHA

ISSUE 40

18th July 2015

MATTOT-MASSEI

2nd Av 5775

Kohen - First Aliya:

Chapter 30, verse 2 - Chapter 31, verse 12

- ✚ Moshe explains to the heads of all the tribes the importance of honouring all vows they have instituted, regardless if they were made to Hashem, another person or even a promise made to themselves to prohibit or refrain from doing something. Moshe also explains ways how the vows can be annulled and negated in certain circumstances.
- ✚ Hashem orders Moshe to avenge Bnai Yisrael by going into battle with the Midianites. During the fighting King Balak, Balaam and all of the Midianite men were killed.

Levi - Second Aliya:

Chapter 31, verses 13 - 54

- ✚ In the war's aftermath, Moshe gives the orders to kill all the women who were Non-Virgins along with any of their male offspring as they were the original instigators of persuading Bnai Yisrael in committing idolatry.
- ✚ Elazar the Kohen teaches the soldiers the laws purify themselves from the ritual impurities caused by war and to how to make their spoils kosher. I.e. if the vessels came into contact with fire they can only be koshered by passing them through fire etc.
- ✚ The rules regarding dividing of the booty between the soldiers, their tribes and the percentage of tithes given to the Levi'im and the Mishkan are instituted.
- ✚ In appreciation to the fact that there was not one Jewish casualty during the war, The commanders and Generals present an added percentage of their spoils to Moshe and Elazar to be used in the upkeep of the Ohel Moed.

Sh'lisi - Third Aliya:

Chapter 32, verses 1 - 19

- ✚ Due to the fact of owning a large supply of livestock, the tribes of Reuven, Gad along with half the tribe of Menashe make a pact with Moshe that once the land of Israel has been fully conquered, they would be allowed to settle down on the eastern side of the River Jordan.

R'VI' - Fourth Aliya:

Chapter 32, verse 20 - Chapter 33 verse 49

- ✚ Moshe recounts and reviews all the forty two places where Bnai Yisrael had encamped since departing from Mitzraim (Egypt), forty years earlier

Chamishi - Fifth Aliya:

Chapter 33, verse 50 – Chapter 34, verse 15

- ✚ When they eventually cross the River Jordan, Hashem instructs Bnai Yisrael to expel all the inhabitants who are dwelling in the land of Canaan and destroy all of their idols.
- ✚ Hashem tells Moshe where the borders of Israel will start and finish. The southern border consists of the Zin desert, the edge of the Dead Sea, and the southern part of the Mediterranean. The northern border will cover the Mediterranean, Mount Hor, Zedad and Hazar-enan.
- ✚ To the east the border will be from Hazar-enan, Ribla, the Kinneret, the River Jordan and the Dead Sea with the Mediterranean Sea bordering the western side.
- ✚ As Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh were going to settle on the eastern bank of the Jordan. The land of Israel was to be divided by lottery amongst the remaining nine and a half tribes.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya:

Chapter 34, verse 16 - Chapter 35, verse 8

- ✚ Hashem appoints a representative from each tribe to allocate their portion of land between their tribal members.
- ✚ As well as the 42 cities designated for the Levi'im, The construction of 6 other Cities are mandated as a place of refuge for those people who have murdered inadvertently.

Sh'vi'i - Seventh Aliya:

Chapter 35, verse 9 – Chapter 36, verse 13

- ✚ The details relating to the inadvertent murderers dwelling in the Ir Miklat (cities of refuge) are discussed.
- ✚ The leaders from the tribe of Menashe approach Moshe with their concerns of who would inherit the land if the daughters of Tzelofhad decide to marry someone outside of their tribe as it could decrease their tribe's property if the land was allocated elsewhere.
- ✚ Moshe tells them not to worry as the Torah states that any inheritance given will always return back to its original tribe when the Yovel arrives and in addition any woman who receives an inheritance are only allowed to marry someone within her own tribe.
- ✚ Just as Hashem commanded Moshe, the five daughters of Tzelofhad obeyed by each marrying a man from the tribe of Menashe.

Haftorah –YERMEYAHU (JEREIMIAH) Chapter 2 verses 4 to 28 and Chapter 4 verses 1 and 2

OVERVIEW

- ✚ Yermeyahu transmits Hashem's message to the Jewish people, in strong tones chastising them for abandoning Hashem.
- ✚ He reminds them of the kindness Hashem did for them, by them leading them out of Mitzraim, through the desert and settling them in the Promised Land, yet they repaid his kindness with their disloyalty towards him.
- ✚ Yermeyahu then goes on to foretell the suffering the Jewish people will suffer at the hands of their enemies but encouragingly assures them that if they repent and do teshuva (return back to Hashem) with sincerity, they will be rightfully restored back to their full glory living in the land of Israel.

LINK TO SEDRA READING:

- ✚ This is the second of the three Haftorah's read during the period of the three weeks between the fast of Tamuz and the ninth of Av.
- ✚ The Haftorah continues the theme of the three weeks and the reasons why we continue to mourn throughout this period due to our tragic losses of not one but two beis Hamikdashim which were destroyed because of our lack of faith and commitment to Hashem.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

In the second of this week's double sedra, we encounter an astounding and perplexing law relating to the Ir Miklat (city of refuge); where a person who accidentally kills another person is allowed to dwell there in order to escape the vengeance of the next of kin, who has the right to kill the perpetrator if they are caught before entering one of these safe havens.

This raises many weighty questions. Does the Torah really permit a person to take the law into his own hands, allowing the next of kin to pursue and perhaps even kill the accidental murderer? Furthermore, isn't this entire issue out of character for the Torah, which in general is so compassionate and protective of human life?

In order to understand the nature of the law of how the Ir Miklat works, we need to look into the types of murderers we are dealing with here. According to our commentators; there are three categories of accidental deaths in which the killer is allowed to escape to the Ir Miklat to await trial and be judged on their actions. The first is the death occurring without any negligence on the part of the perpetrator. The second category, known as Shogeg, where the accidental death occurred due to petty negligence and the third scenario, is a case where there was gross negligence on the part of the murderer. In all three cases, the killers run to the nearest city of refuge and since the distances to reach one of these cities was never that far to get to, it meant their safety was virtually assured before the Murdered next of kin could enact their vengeance upon them.

In reality believe it or not this resolution is actually more beneficial for the avengers more than the perpetrators because their actions could lead to facing a trial themselves and if found guilty being punished accordingly. The next of kin, cannot really be expected to exact retribution and kill the perpetrator, because they don't know into which particular "accidental" category the perpetrator has fallen into. If the death was truly accidental and there was no negligence involved, the killer is not at all at fault, and is entitled to go free. However in the instance of gross negligence, the killer must stand before the beis din and be tried for murder; facing the consequences issued to them by the judges. It's only in the case of Shogeg, where the death was due to petty negligence, where the killer can be put to death by the next of kin.

In a fascinating nuance the Torah's principle of the sanctity of human life is still intact. In today's society most of us are covered by liability or accident insurance in case of an inadvertent mishap. The Torah, on the other hand, posits that even petty negligence may not be excused, that the perpetrator must be held accountable for their errors and undergo rehabilitation. This is accomplished by bringing all the accidental killers together to a city of refuge for the equivalent of "group therapy," and re-educating them regarding the ultimate value of the sanctity of life.

I've come to understand from what seems to be a primitive and perplexing law of the Torah, is actually light-years ahead of contemporary legal practices and of modern social philosophy and could easily be re-instituted in our modern laws today.

