

Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHA

ISSUE 40

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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'lishi - 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.

GEMATRIA LINKED THE TO SEDRA:

- ✚ When Moshe is reviewing all the locations Bnai Yisrael at encamped since leaving Mitzraim it's interesting to see how the numerical value of the first two places mentioned is actually recounting Jewish history from the time of Avraham until King Shlomo.
- ✚ The first place, רעמסס Ramses has the gematria of 430, corresponding to the number of years between the covenant made with Avraham until the Exodus. And the gematria of the second place, סוכת Succot adds up to 480, which is the same number of years between the Exodus and the construction of the first Beis Hamikdash.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

This week's double Torah portion, Matos-Massei, opens with a lengthy and intricate discussion of the concepts of "the vow". The Torah insists that any words we express must be taken very seriously because the power of speech is sacred. The traditional understanding of this basic text regarding the taking of oath's is in reference to either a vow refraining oneself from life's pleasures as a sacrifice to Hashem or an oath taken in a court of law, relating to personal declarations of a religious nature.

According to the Rabbis, a vow refers to an object an oath is to the person. For instance, someone may impose a ban on themselves from drinking wine for a given period, perhaps as a means of controlling their drinking habits that seem to be getting out of control. This ban on the object, the wine, is said to constitute a vow. If, on the other hand, the person swore that they will not drink wine, then this constitutes as an oath. In both instances to break one's word is a religious rather than an ethical offense.

With this in mind, can making an Oath and swearing by it in Hashem's name ever be truly annulled? After all, hasn't the crime of breaking the 3rd of the Ten Commandments of taking Hashem's name in vain just taken place by breaking it? The Torah, ever practical, answers "yes!", and describes some of the procedures designed to release a person from his or her vows whilst avoiding the punishment of this commandment. So much so, in the Talmud, there is an entire tractate devoted to this topic, and specifies all the circumstances and conditions under which such a release can be obtained.

Once a person, verbally makes a commitment, he or she becomes duty-bound to perform and honour it. Sometimes, we say things on the spur of the moment without thinking it through first and end up overextending ourselves and making promises that are way beyond our capacity to fulfill and would be virtually impossible to keep; in effect breaking said vow. Luckily for us as we see in the opening verses (Bamidbar 30:1-17) the Torah offer us a 'get out of jail free card'. A chance to annul and release us from the oath's we swore to uphold.

One of the most well-known ways to release us from our personal vows and promises is a passage we read every year 'The Kol Nidrei Prayer' which ushers in our most hallowed day of Yom Kippur. Kol Nidrei is not really a prayer in the ordinary sense. Rather, it's a statement in which we declare our past vows null and void.

During the entire year, you and I make many commitments and resolutions. With the noblest of motives, we promise things to our loved ones or verbally establish objectives to improve ourselves either physically or spiritually. For example, simply vowing to study torah more, recite Tehilim on a daily basis, lose weight, stop smoking, start exercising more etc. .

As the year wears on, we may have to alter our priorities because our situations have dramatically changed over the course of time, meaning that what may have been easy to achieve back then is now no longer possible to undertake. Therefore, at least one time each year, on Yom Kippur, we are able to realize how unrealistic we were and that we erred in our assessment of what we could accomplish. The Torah in its wisdom has given us the ability to we ask that the Almighty release us from these impossible and often no longer relevant commitments, and begin with Divine help a new clean unblemished slate, hoping that the next time we make a promise, it will be one that we will be able to keep.

Judaism teaches us the primary importance of keeping our word. But it does not lose sight of our human frailties and limitations and recognizes that often it is not moral failure that explains our lack of integrity, but simple human weakness on our part. Which is why if we are sincere enough and truly believe in what we say then Hashem in his mercy will surely annul the vow's made and forgive us wholeheartedly even though we may have taken his divine name in vain.

