

## מאמרי תורה – Torah Talk



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Parashot Matot-Masei  
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פרשות מטות-מסעי  
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Torah Reading: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 30:2-36:13

In *Parashat Matot*, Moshe describes the laws of oaths; the Bnei Yisrael battle the Midianites; and the tribes of Reuven and Gad request to dwell outside of the Land of Israel. In *Parashat Masei*, the final *parasha* of the book of *Bemidbar* (Numbers), the Bnei Yisrael stand on the banks of the Jordan River, ready to enter into the Promised Land. First, the path of their journey is reviewed and then the laws pertaining to the division of the Land are given. The boundaries of the Land of Yisrael are described and instructions are given to establish cities for the *Levi'im* (Levites) as well as *Arei Miklat* (Cities of Refuge). The book concludes with an affirmation of the claim on land of the daughters of Tzelophchad.

Let's take a closer look at the episode of Reuven and Gad's request to live outside of the borders of the Land (chapter 32), paying particular attention to a specific word that appears multiple times in this passage:

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| <p>א וּמְקַנָּה רַב, הָיָה לְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן<br/>וְלְבְנֵי-גָד--עֲצוּם מְאֹד; וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת-<br/>אֶרֶץ יַעֲזֵר, וְאֶת-אֶרֶץ גִּלְעָד, וַהֲנִיחַ<br/>הַמָּקוֹם, מָקוֹם מְקַנָּה.</p> <p>ב וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-גָד, וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן;<br/>וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אֶלְעָזָר<br/>הַכֹּהֵן, וְאֶל-נְשִׂיאֵי הָעֵדָה לֵאמֹר.</p> <p>ד ...הָאֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר הִכָּה ה' לְפָנָי<br/>עֵדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל--אֶרֶץ מְקַנָּה, הוּא;<br/>וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ, מְקַנָּה.</p> | <p>1 Now the children of Reuven and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle; and when they saw the land of Yazer, and the land of Gilad, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle,</p> <p>2 the children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and spoke to Moshe, and to Elazar the priest, and to the princes of the congregation, saying:</p> <p>4 ...the land which Hashem smote before the congregation of Yisrael, is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle.'</p> |
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ה וַיֹּאמְרוּ, אִם-מָצָאנוּ חֵן  
בְּעֵינֶיךָ--יִתֵּן אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת  
לְעַבְדֶיךָ, לְאֶחְזָה: אֶל-תַּעֲבֵרְנוּ,  
אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן.

5 And they said: 'If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not bring us over the **Yarden** [Jordan River].'

ו וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, לְבְנֵי-גָד וְלְבְנֵי  
רְאוּבֵן: הֲאֶחֱיִכֶם, יָבֹאוּ  
לְמַלְחָמָה, וְאַתֶּם, תֵּשְׁבוּ פֹה.

6 And Moshe said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuven: 'Shall your kin go to war, and shall you sit here?

ז וְלָמָּה תִּנְוֹאוּן (תִּנְיֹאוּן), אֶת-לֵב  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל--מֵעֵבֶר, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ,  
אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן לָהֶם, ה'....

7 And why will you turn away the heart of Bnei Yisrael from going over into the land which Hashem has given them?...

טז וַיָּגִשׁוּ אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ, גְּדֹרֹת  
צֹאן נִבְנֶה לְמִקְנֵנוּ פֹה, וְעָרִים,  
לְטַפְּנוּ.

16 And they came near to him, and said: 'We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones;

יז וְאַנְחֵנוּ נִחְלָץ חַשְׁמַיִם, לְפָנֵי בְנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם-הִבִּיאֲנֶם,  
אֶל-מְקוֹמָם; וְיָשֹׁב טַפְּנוּ בְּעָרֵי  
הַמְּבֻצָּר, מִפְּנֵי יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ.

17 but we ourselves will be ready armed to go before Bnei Yisrael, until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones shall dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land.

יח לֹא נָשׁוּב, אֶל-בְּתִינּוּ--עַד,  
הַתְּנַחֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אִישׁ, נַחֲלָתוֹ.

18 We will not return to our houses, until Bnei Yisrael have inherited every person his inheritance.

יט כִּי לֹא נִנְחַל אִתְּם, מֵעֵבֶר  
לְיַרְדֵּן וְהִלָּאָה: כִּי בָּאָה נַחֲלָתְנוּ  
אֵלֵינוּ, מֵעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן מִזְרָחָה.

19 For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the **Yarden**, and forward, because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side of the **Yarden** eastward.'

כ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מֹשֶׁה, אִם-  
תַּעֲשׂוּן אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה: אִם-  
תִּנְחַלְצוּ לְפָנֵי ה', לְמַלְחָמָה.

20 And Moses said to them: 'If you will do this thing: if you will arm yourselves to go before Hashem to the war,

כא וְעֵבֶר לָכֶם כָּל-חֵלוֹץ אֶת-  
הַיַּרְדֵּן, לְפָנֵי ה', עַד הוֹרִישׁוּ אֶת-  
אֹיְבָיו, מִפְּנָיו.

21 and every armed man of you will pass over the **Yarden** before Hashem, until He has driven out His enemies from before Him,

כב וְנִכְבְּשָׁה הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֵי ה', וְאַחַר  
תֵּשְׁבוּ--וְהִיִּיתֶם נְקִיִּים מֵה',

22 and the land be subdued before Hashem, and you return afterward; then you shall be clear before

ומישׂרָאֵל; וְהִיְתָה הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְכֶם, לְאֶחְזָה--לְפָנֵי ה'.

Hashem, and before Yisrael, and this land shall be to you for a possession before Hashem.

**כג** וְאִם-לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן כֵּן, הִנֵּה חֲטָאתֶם לַה'; וְיָדְעוּ, חֲטָאתְכֶם, אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא, אֶתְכֶם.

**23** But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against Hashem; and know your sin which will find you.

**כד** בְּנוּ-לְכֶם עָרִים לְטִפְכֶם, וּגְדַרְתֶּם לְצִנְאֲכֶם; וְהִיצֵא מִפִּיכֶם, תַעֲשׂוּ.

**24** Build your cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep; and do that which has proceeded out of your mouth.'

**כה** וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנֵי-גָד וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: עֲבָדֶיךָ יַעֲשׂוּ, כַּאֲשֶׁר אָדָנִי מִצִּוָּה.

**25** And the children of Gad and the children of Reuven spoke to Moshe, saying: 'Your servants will do as my lord commands.

**כו** טַפְנוּ נָשִׁינוּ, מִקְנֵנוּ וְכָל-בְּהֵמַתֵּנוּ--יְהִיו-שָׁם, בְּעָרֵי הַגִּלְעָד.

**26** Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our cattle, shall be there in the cities of Gilad;

**כז** וְעֲבָדֶיךָ יַעֲבְרוּ כָל-חַלּוּץ צָבָא, לְפָנֵי ה'--לְמַלְחָמָה: כַּאֲשֶׁר אָדָנִי, דִּבֶּר....

**27** but your servants will pass over, every man that is armed for war, before Hashem to battle, as my lord says.'...

**כט** וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם, אִם-יַעֲבְרוּ בְנֵי-גָד וּבְנֵי-רְאוּבֵן אֶתְכֶם אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן כָּל-חַלּוּץ לְמַלְחָמָה לְפָנֵי ה', וְנִכְבְּשָׁה הָאָרֶץ, לְפָנֵיכֶם-וַיִּנְתְּתֶם לָהֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ הַגִּלְעָד, לְאֶחְזָה.

**29** And Moshe said to them: 'If the children of Gad and the children of Reuven will pass with you over the **Yarden**, every man that is armed to battle, before Hashem, and the land shall be subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilad for a possession;

**ל** וְאִם-לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ חַלּוּצִים, אֶתְכֶם--וְנִאֶחְזוּ בְּתֹכְכֶם, בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן.

**30** but if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Cana'an.'

**לא** וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי-גָד וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן, לֵאמֹר: אֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר הוּא אֵל-עֲבָדֶיךָ, כֵּן נַעֲשֶׂה.

**31** And the children of Gad and the children of Reuven answered, saying: 'As Hashem has said to your servants, so will we do.

**לב** נִחְנוּ נַעֲבֵר חַלּוּצִים לְפָנֵי ה', אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן; וְאֶתְנוּ אֶחְזֹת נַחֲלָתֵנוּ, מֵעַבְרָ לַיַּרְדֵּן.

**32** We will pass over armed before Hashem into the land of Cana'an, and the possession of our inheritance shall remain with us beyond the **Yarden**.'

The word “Yarden” appears six times in this episode. It is a *milah manchah*, a guide word, clueing us in on one possible message in this section of the text. The people of Gad and Reuven are making it quite clear to Moshe that they have no interest in crossing the Jordan River and entering the Land.

Now place yourself in Moshe’s shoes. More than anything else in his life, he wants to enter the Land of Israel, and has been told by God that he will never be allowed to do so, shattering his dream of 40 years. Then, here come these people cavalierly asserting that they could not care less about the land – in order to have room for their cattle on the east side of the river, no less! How must have Moshe felt when faced with this attitude? His greatest wish was being minimized by two of the twelve tribes of Yisrael.

Despite what might have elicited despair from Moshe, he once again behaves like a leader, finding a way to satisfy their request while assuring that the rest of the nation would remain safe while conquering the Land.

We learn what a stellar leader Moshe was, conquering his personal feelings for the sake of the nation. However, a more important lesson to take away from this section is that even when we want to question or reject the status quo, even when we want to cause positive disruption, we need to take a moment to put ourselves in the shoes of others whom this request or disruption might affect. This is often a tall order and yet, it is an act that this section seems to indicate is expected of us as we develop into empathetic and compassionate people.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- How might you have felt in this situation if you were Moshe?
- What could the tribes of Gad and Reuven have done or said to mitigate any hurt that Moshe might feel in response to their request? Why do you think they did not do or say anything along those lines?
- Count the number of times that the word “cattle” and related words appear in this section. Do you think that “cattle” is also a guide word? If so, what is it trying to tell us about the one of the themes of this section of text?