

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashot Matot-Masei
July 22, 2017

פרשת מטות-מסעי
כ"ח בתמוז תשע"ז

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. 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); and the book concludes with an affirmation of the claim on land of the daughters of Tzelophchad.

Many important lessons can be derived from the story of Reuven and Gad. Chapter 32 states:

א ומקנה רב היה לבני ראובן ולבני גד עצום מאד ויראו את־ארץ יעזר ואת־
ארץ גלעד והנה המקום מקום מקנה: ב ויבאו בני גד ובני ראובן ויאמרו
אל־משה ואל־אלעזר הכהן ואל־נשיאי העדה לאמר: ... ד הארץ אשר הפה
ה' לפני עדת ישראל ארץ מקנה הוא ולעבדיך מקנה: ה ויאמרו אם־מצאנו
חן בעיניך יתן את־הארץ הזאת לעבדיך לאחזה אל־תעברנו את־הירדן: ו
ויאמר משה לבני גד ולבני ראובן האחיכם יבאו למלחמה ואתם תישבו פה:
ז ולמה תניאון את־לב בני ישראל מעבר אל־הארץ אשר־נתן להם ה': ... ט
ויגשו אליו ויאמרו גדרת צאן נבנה למקננו פה וערים לטפנו: יז ואנחנו נחלץ
חשים לפני בני ישראל עד אשר אס־הביאנם אל־מקומם וישב טפנו בערי
המבצר מפני ישבי הארץ: יח לא נשוב אל־בתינו עד התנחל בני ישראל איש
נחלתו: יט כי לא נחל אתם מעבר לירדן והלאה כי באה נחלתנו אלינו
מעבר הירדן מזרחה:

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, **2** the children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and spoke to Moshe, and to Elazar the cohen, and to the princes of the congregation, saying: ... **4** the land which Hashem smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle.' **5** And they said: 'If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not bring us over the Jordan.' **6** And Moshe said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuven: 'Shall your brothers go to the war, and shall you sit here? **7** And why would you turn away the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which Hashem has given them? ... **16** And they [the children of Reuven and the children of Gad] came near to him [Moshe], and said: 'We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones; **17** but we ourselves will be ready armed to go before the children of Israel, 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. **18** We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance. **19** For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan, and forward, because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side of the Jordan eastward.'

Right from the beginning of the existence of the Jewish people, various subcultures existed. The members of the tribe of Dan were the artisans; the tribes of Efraim and Menashe were considered warriors; Yissachar were the scholars; Levi was the tribe who served in the Mishkan; Shimon were the teachers. Each tribe had its own focus and its own way of processing the world. In this chapter, we see the leaders of Reuven and Gad, due to their tribes' focus on grazing cattle, asking in essence to live apart from their Jewish brethren across the Jordan River.

This chapter brings into focus that the Jews were never monolithic, and that anyone who thinks otherwise is sorely mistaken. In the Biblical era – indeed, until the 19th century – Jews did not divide into denominations as we do today. However, the different segments of the Jewish people always had divergent approaches to the service of God. Those differences were not always respected, even in the Biblical era, but perhaps here Moshe is paving the way for the proper means of functioning as a people.

The members of Reuven and Gad are granted their request to live on the east bank of the Jordan River, with a major caveat, however. The Jews as a unified whole are to enter the Land, conquer it together, and then each settle their individual portions.

Reuven and Gad agree to this, and, as we see in *Sefer Yehoshua*, the Book of Joshua, they fulfill their promise to assist in conquering and settling the Land of Israel. Despite the differences in their subcultures, when push came to shove, they banded together and worked side-by-side to do what was necessary for the nation as a whole. Can we say the same of ourselves today?

Whether it is a question of who may pray at the Western Wall, or who is a Jew, or which rabbis are “acceptable,” the Jewish people today unfortunately seem to be in a state of division rather than unity. This situation is especially regrettable at this time of the year, when we are headed toward *Tisha B’Av*, which commemorates the destruction of the both Temples, the second of which is said to have been destroyed on account of *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred. Perhaps, a lesson here can be derived from a famous statement by Mahatma Gandhi: [We need to] be the change [we] want to see in the world.

Something to think about as we head into the Nine Days leading up to the Fast of the Ninth of Av.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- How are all Jews alike? What do we all have in common?
- When and how should the Jewish people band together no matter what their differences?
- How can each of us help that happen?