



Ohr Yerushalayim News

פרשת מטות מסעי - ב אב תשע"ה - 18th July 2015 - Volume 8 - Issue 2

News This Week

מזל טוב
 Mazel Tov to Mr & Mrs Jeffrey Horwich on the recent birth of their granddaughter, Shifra Bayla, born to Mr & Mrs D Pick.
 Mazel Tov to Rabbi & Mrs Yehuda Pearlman on the engagement of their daughter, Nechami, to Shimmi Halberstadt.

Last Reminder for JIRC
 A final reminder that donations for the recent appeal for JIRC can be given to Chizky Salomon.

Worst Second Guess Rabbi Pinchas Winston (Torah.org)

Moshe said to them, "Did you allow all the females to live? (Bamidbar 31:15)

Imagine that a person almost dies because of smoking. After emergency surgery and weeks of rehabilitation, he returns home and is visited shortly after by his doctor. After entering, the doctor is shocked to see how many packets of cigarettes are scattered throughout the apartment, some even full. "Did this guy not learn anything from his experience?" the doctor asks himself with frustration.

Even if the patient tells the doctor, "Nothing to work about doc! My surgery so shook me up that I'll never smoke again!" the doctor will not be put at ease until every last trace of cigarette is gone from his patient's world. Bad habits are hard to break. As time goes on, the bad memories tend to fade and cease to be a defense even against deadly habits. We may not forget intellectually, but we often forget emotionally.

This is why it is difficult to understand how the army that Moshe Rabbeinu sent out against Midian in this week's parshah brought back the women who were the reason for the entire military campaign in the first place. It can be assumed that the army Moshe chose, for this reason, was not from the "bottom of the barrel," but hand-picked from each tribe to do the job and make their leaders proud.

Even more interesting is the fact that Pinchas went along with them. He led them into battle and was the one to actually kill Bilaam who happened to be in Midian at the time collecting his fee for the whole episode. Unlike Aharon who, at Mt. Sinai after Moshe questioned how he could participate in the building of the golden calf, we don't find Pinchas excusing himself from what took place. It's as if he agreed to the plan as well.

In addition, this episode comes right before a similar one. Right after, the children of Gad, Reuven, and half of the tribe of Menashe ask permission to live on the east side of the Jordan river, effectively relinquishing all rights to their portions in Eretz Yisroel. For all intents and purposes, this is a rejection of Eretz Yisroel at the end of the 40 years in the desert like the one that happened to cause the 40 years in the desert in this first place.

Granted they did it more diplomatically this time. Rather than put terror in the hearts of the people and make the Land seem unconquerable as their forebears did, the children of Reuven, Gad, and Menashe simply made it look as if the east side of the Jordan was better for their flocks. They didn't say that Eretz Yisroel wasn't a nice place to go, just that the east side of the Jordan was a better place to go, at least for them.

Again, the obvious seemed not so obvious to them. Of all the things to ask for at the end of the 40 years, just after the decree of the punishment for the Spies ended, this would seem to be the last. At least they should have waited until everyone had entered and conquered the land. They should have made their request at the time the Land was being divided among the rest of the tribes.

Sometimes a situation is as weird as it seems. Other times because it is so bizarre there has to be a better explanation, even if it is less obvious. The road to Gehinom may be paved with good intention, but it still counts for something.

To begin with, the Midian fiasco was an unmitigated disaster. In a short span of time, 176,000 people died through Bais Din because of their worshipping of idols. The Talmud says that if a Bais Din kills only one person within 70 years it is called a "hanging Bais Din." What is it called when it carries out capital punishment on 176,000 people in a couple of days?

This, plus the 24,000 from the tribe of Shimon who died through plague rounded off the number of deaths to 200,000 within a single week. Even war doesn't cause death at that rate unless a nuclear bomb is dropped over a city, and even then the number would probably be smaller.

It didn't end there either. Because of Bilaam's plan, the Jewish people had to assemble an army and travel all the way back in the

The Week Ahead

פרשת מטות מסעי	
Mincha	7.30pm
Candle Lighting	7.46 - 7.55pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.08am
1st Mincha	2.00pm
Ovos uBonim	5.00pm
2nd Mincha	6.00pm
3rd Mincha	9.32pm
Rov's Shiur	following
Motzei Shabbos	10.37pm
Sunday	7.15am / 8.20am
Monday / Thursday	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tuesday / Wednesday / Friday	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv (excl. Sunday)	10.25pm

direction of Egypt to take revenge against Midian. Aside from the risk and discomfort involved, it was a major hassle. It only emphasized how bad the entire episode was from G-d's perspective.

We can assume, therefore, that when the Jewish people went off to battle it was in a repentant mood. It is safe to assume that they wanted to make right what had gone wrong, to bring the perpetrators to justice. After all, this was Divine revenge against Midian for their despicable act and incredible arrogance. Who was going to stand in the way of that? Not the troops going off to battle, and certainly not Pinchas who was leading them.

They had no problem killing off the leaders of Midian and the male citizens who allowed their own women to be used in such an depraved manner. The sin may have occurred with their help, but it did not occur through them personally, so killing them was as much justice as they required.

But then there was the issue of the Midianite women. They had been used to perpetrate the sin. They were the ones who brought the Jewish males to illicit relationships and idol worship. They could have said no to their men who sent them, or run away after they did. They didn't. Instead they allowed themselves to be used in such an illicit manner though the Jewish people had no plans to even attack Midian or Moav.

Therefore, the soldiers may have reasoned, death was too good for them. To be killed on the spot would never allow them to pay back to the Jewish people what they had taken. Like a thief who cannot repay what he has stolen, and is made to work off what he owes, perhaps they thought that prolonged subservience of the Midianite women might make up somewhat for what they had caused.

On the contrary, by subduing the women of Midian, they themselves would have a constant reminder of what happened and what to avoid in the future. According to this logic, they had a halachic justification for their action, which is why they returned to Moshe Rabbeinu satisfied that they had correctly discharged their military obligation. Only once they returned and Moshe Rabbeinu criticized them did they wake up to their erroneous and dangerous decision.

This is similar to what happened with Shaul HaMelech who did not kill the king of Amalek as commanded. He too came back satisfied with his military success, declaring that he had done all that G-d had told him to do. This was until, that is, Shmuel HaNavi told him otherwise in no uncertain terms. Then, all of a sudden, as if he woke up from a bad dream, Shaul realized his mistake and what it was going to cost him.

What had Shaul HaMelech been thinking? This too is a question debated over the ages. The "Oneg Yom Tov" provides a very interesting and plausible explanation, saying that Shaul HaMelech had every intention of killing Agag. He only held back temporarily in order to bring booty from Amalek and offer it to G-d in thanks for success in battle. If he had waited to do so until after Agag was killed, then, as per the law, all Amalekian property would have been in need of complete destruction.

Great thinking, wrong time. As Shmuel tells him, what good are sacrifices to G-d if they come at the cost of what He commanded to be done. Similarly, Moshe Rabbeinu could have been telling the returning soldiers and their leaders: What good is your idea of retribution if it interferes with G-d's?

The bottom line: Do not second guess G-d.

Yitzchak Avinu understood this and stuck with it to the point of almost blessing Eisav. You can be sure that he knew Eisav was unfitting for the blessing, especially since his wife certainly did. But Eisav was also the firstborn and the halachah said the blessing

should go to him, something that only G-d could decide to override. Therefore, Yitzchak did his part right while Divine Providence took care of the rest. Ya'akov received the blessing for which he was most fitting while Yitzchak did not even try to second guess G-d.

The tribes of Reuven, Gad, and Half-Menashe had to believe that they were doing the right thing when they asked to live on the east side of the Jordan river. Perhaps they imagined themselves being a buffer of sorts between the people of Eretz Yisroel and the rest of the world to the east. Alternatively, maybe they thought that they could act as a prism of sorts to project Torah to the world beyond the borders of Eretz Yisroel.

In truth, we should recall:

On that day, G-d formed a covenant with Avram, saying, "To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt until the great river, the Euphrates river, [as well as the land belonging to the Kenites, the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites . . ." (Bereishis 15:18-19)

The Kenites: There are 10 nations [enumerated] here, but He gave them only seven nations. The [other] three are Edom, Moav, and Ammon, and they are [here referred to as] the Kenites, the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, which are destined to be [our] heritage in the future, as it says: "they shall stretch forth their hand upon Edom and Moav, and the children of Ammon shall obey them" (Yeshayahu 11:14). (Rashi)

Clearly G-d intended from the start that the land east of the Jordan should be part of Eretz Yisroel. The tribes of Reuven, Gad and Half-Menashe were just moving in a little earlier than Divinely planned. Perhaps, then, settling the land east of the Jordan at that time did not technically constitute living in the Diaspora, but in a satellite state of Eretz Yisroel. From their point of view, they weren't rejecting Eretz Yisroel but extending its borders east of the Jordan river.

This too is called second guessing G-d. There was a reason, a Divine reason, why G-d was not yet making good on His promise to give the land of 10 nations to the descendants of Avraham. He wasn't renegeing on His bris, just fulfilling it in stages as per the development of the Jewish nation. It was G-d's way of saying that we were not yet ready to enter the Messianic Era, and if history teaches us anything at all it is the importance of timing in doing important and impactful things.

It is easy to be a Gad, Reuven, or Half-Menashe, and far more difficult to be a Yitzchak Avinu. People are always second guessing G-d, and often getting in trouble for it. Sometimes they get off lightly and learn little. Other times the results are disastrous and people find themselves asking, "What was I thinking?"

What is the essential difference between before and after? The yetzer hara. The Children of Gad, Reuven, and Half-Menashe had one, especially after interaction with the women of Midian. Yitzchak, ever since the Akeidah, did not. Their "good intention" was mixed together with the yetzer hara, albeit on a somewhat "microscopic" level, and therefore not so visible to the eye. It is the kind of yetzer hara that can take a good idea and bend it ever so slightly so that it takes a person off course, but not so clearly at the beginning. Only over time does the deviation become clear, retroactively, and after the damage has been done.

That is when "good intentions" have the ability to pave a path to Gehinom. This is when corruption can seep into the thinking of even righteous people. It is something that a person has to keep in mind when considering doing anything that is spiritually risky. It is something a person should ask another about, someone who does not have anything to gain from the result either way, before carrying out their plan. This will allow them to be certain that they have truly fulfilled the will of G-d.