

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT MATTOS-MASSAI

DVAR TORAH: THE TORAH'S INTENT

The Torah makes a point of mentioning that the daughters of Tzelafchad married their cousins (Bamidbar 36:12). After the daughters of Tzelafchad were granted their father's portion in the land of Israel (Bamidbar 27:7), the leaders of the tribe of Menasheh became worried. If those five women marry men from other tribes, the parcels of land they inherited would transfer to their husband's tribe, since inheritance usually follows the male line. In one generation all of Tzelafchad's property might leave Menasheh. Hashem then accepts the leaders' claim and Tzelafchad's daughters were directed to marry men of their own tribe.

But why did they marry their cousins? They could have married any of the men of Menasheh.

The Sforno (Bamidbar 36:12) explains: When the daughters of Tzelafchad heard Hashem's instructions, they saw that His intent was that inheritance should not transfer. They were permitted to choose husbands from their entire tribe, which would prevent their inheritance from leaving their tribe. But they chose to marry cousins, thereby preventing their inheritance from leaving even their family. They didn't merely follow the Divine instructions; they went one step beyond and followed what was clearly the Divine intent.

We are sometimes even mandated to not only follow the Torah's laws but also the Torah's intent. One prominent example is the prohibition against *צער בעלי חיים*, causing pain to animals. Even though the Gemara says that causing pain to animals is a biblical prohibition (Bava Metzia 32b), we find no explicit verse that prohibits it. Rashi (Shabbat 128b) writes that the source for this prohibition is the mitzvah to help unload a donkey pressured by a heavy load. The goal, the intent, of that mitzvah is to avoid causing pain to the animal. Harav Asher Weiss, שליט"א, in an essay called *רצון התורה*, "The Torah's Will," (in *Minchas Asher Devarim* 51, pp. 356-362) scans the literature of the Rishonim and Acharonim and lists a total of eleven (!) possible sources for the prohibition against causing pain to animals.

There are two ways, he says, to find out what the will of the Torah is: one is through the Torah's mitzvot, and the other is through the verses of the Torah. An example of the latter is the concept of *הידור מצוה*, beautifying a mitzvah, that is derived from explaining the People of Israel's exclamation in the Song of the Sea, "זה קלי ואנוני", as "This is my G d and I will beautify Him" (Shemot 15:2).

There are two important limitations to this approach. One is that following the Divine intent should never cause us to go against any of the Divine rules and laws; we must not break halachah because we are somehow convinced that Hashem intends it. Second (see p. 358 of the article in *Minchas Asher*), is that we rule according to the approach *לא דרשינן טעמא דקרא*, that the intent behind a mitzvah does not determine its details (see Bava Metzia 115a).

However, when it involves going beyond what is required, we should, like the daughters of Tzelafchad, strive not only to follow Hashem's laws, but also His Will.

SOURCE GUIDE: THE POWER TO VOW

Over the thirty years (1871-1901) when Harav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, זצ"ל, wrote his classic work Sfat Emet, he frequently revisits the theme of the human power that underlies the ability to make vows. The passage about vows, that opens this week's double parshah, raises a number of difficulties. This source guide is built on the Sfat Emet's solutions to those difficulties, and related ideas he developed over the years.

A. Difficulties

The section in the Torah about vows (Bamidbar 30:1-17) presents a number of difficulties:

- Why does the Torah postpone presenting this passage until the very end of the book of Bamidbar, at the end of the fortieth year of the Jews's travels through the desert?
- Why does it appear immediately after the section about the daily and Musaf sacrifices (Bamidbar 28-29)?
- Why does Moshe direct his words about vows to the princes of the tribes? Here's how the section opens:

<p>1. Bamidbar 30:2 Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel saying: This is the thing that Hashem commanded.</p>	<p>במדבר ל:ב וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רְאֵשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר: זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'.</p>
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B. Speech

The Sfat Emet makes an inference from the Torah's choice of words for not keeping a vow:

<p>2. Bamidbar 30:3 When a man makes a vow to Hashem or if he takes an oath to prohibit something upon himself – he should not profane his word. He should act according to what comes out of his mouth.</p>	<p>במדבר ל:ג אִישׁ כִּי יָדַר נֶדְרָ לַה' אוֹ הִשָּׁבַע שְׁבַע לְאִסֹּר אִסֹּר עַל נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ, כְּכֹל הַיֵּצֵא מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה.</p>
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The antonym of חילול - profane, is קדוש – holy, as is evident from a number of verses in the Tanach. Here is one example (see also Vayikra 21:23, 22:2, and 22:15, as well as Yechezkel 22:8, and 22:26):

<p>3. Shemot 31:14 You should keep the Shabbat for it is holy to you; those who profane (violate) it shall be put to death ...</p>	<p>שמות לא:יד וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת כִּי קֹדֶשׁ הוּא לָכֶם מִחֻלְלֶיהָ מוֹת יוּמָת ...</p>
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The Sfat Emet makes a simple inference:

<p>4. Sfat Emet Parshat Matot 5635 For it is written, "He should not profane his word," and Rashi explains, "He should not treat his word as חולין, unholy." Apparently, speech (when unflawed) is holy.</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת מטות - שנת [תרל"ה] דכתיב "לא יחל דברו," פרש"י "לא יעשה דבריו חולין." מכלל שהדיבור הוא קודש.</p>
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The holiness of our speech, he says, is rooted in the creation of man, and comes from the Divine 'breath':

<p>5. Sfat Emet Parshat Matot 5635 For [speech] comes from the vapor and spirit within a man, as it is written, "He (Hashem) blew into his nostrils a breath of life and the man became a living soul" (Bereishit 2:7). [This is explained by Targum Unkelos as] "a spirit of speech." It follows that man's spirit (the source of his speech) is holy (directly from the Divine 'breath').</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת מטות - שנת [תרל"ה] כי הוא מהבל ורוח שבאדם דכ' "ויפח באפיו כו' ויהי כו' לנפש חי" - "לרוח ממלא." נמצא שרוח האדם הוא קודש.</p>
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C. Solutions

This helps us resolve the difficulties we raised above:

- Even though our speech is inherently holy, its holiness needed to be cultivated through Torah:

<p>6. Sfat Emet Parshat Matot 5661 Apparently the power of speech is holy. This is the power of the mouth that Israel merited through the power of Torah. The entire forty years that Moshe was involved in teaching them Torah fixed within them the power of the voice and the holy tongue. He therefore commanded them to be careful about speech.</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת מטות - שנת [תרס"א] מכלל שכח הדיבור קודש והוא כח הפה שזכו בני"ב כחה התורה. וכל מ' שנה שעסק עמהם משה רבינו ע"ה בתורה קבע בהם כח הקול ולשון הקודש. לכן צוה להם על שמירת הדיבור.</p>
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- The holiness of our speech also explains why the passage about vows follows that of the sacrifices:

<p>7. Sfat Emet Parshat Matot 5661 It immediately follows the passage about daily and additional (holiday) offerings, for our prayers are able to replace the daily offerings, as it says, “Our lips will make up for the oxen offerings” (Hoshea 14:3). This is the power of the mouths of Israel, like the early ones who would pray with the Divine Name ...</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת מטות - שנת [תרס"א] ונסמכה הפרשה לתמידין ומוספין להיות התפלות במקום תמידין כמ"ש ונשלמה פרים שפתינו. וזהו בכח פיהם של ישראל כמו הראשונים שהתפללו בשם ...</p>
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- The Torah's portion about vows was first transmitted to the heads of the tribes, those great individuals whose personal morality and speech are already on a lofty level and who are able to influence the rest of the nation:

<p>7. Sfat Emet Parshat Matot 5661 The heads of the People of Israel, who through their speech and acceptance of the yoke of Heaven are able to make an impression on and create an inclination (הטיה) of the hearts of the People of Israel. This is why they are referred to as the heads of the tribes (מטות).</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת מטות - שנת [תרל"ח] ... ראשי בני ישראל שעל ידי דיבורם וקבלת מלכות שמים שהם מקבלים עושים רושם והטי' לכלל לבות בני". לכן נקראו ראשי המטות. וכ' זה הדבר כו' שנמסר בידם כח הדיבור שחל על דבריהם שם שמים ביותר ...</p>
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D. Shabbat and the Three Weeks

Shabbat's יתרה נשמה, extra soul power, gives us the ability to open us up to the power of speech:

<p>8. Sfat Emet Parshat Matot 5661 Similarly, Shabbat is referred to as an unlimited inheritance because the power of the mouth is opened up. The verse says “You will [honor Shabbat] through speech,” (Yishayahu 58:13) [and Chazal say,] “Your speech on Shabbat should be different from that of the rest of the week” (Shabbat 113b). The reason for this is that on Shabbat we have an extra soul and therefore the power of our mouths is increased. This is based on the verse, “He blew into his nostrils a breath of life and the man became a living soul” (Bereishit 2:7), “a spirit of speech.” Through the holiness of the soul the power of the mouth is opened up.</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת מטות - שנת [תרס"א] וכמו כן בשבת שנקרא נחלה בלי מצרים לפי שבו נפתח כח הפה כמ"ש "ודבר דבר" – שלא יהי' דבורך בשבת כדבורך בחול. והטעם לפי שבו יש נשמה יתירה ונתחזק כח הפה, כמ"ש "ויפח באפיו ויהי לנפש חיה" - "לרוח מללא". ועי' קדושת הנשמה נפתח כח הפה.</p>
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The Three Weeks, בין המצרים, is also an especially appropriate time to strengthen our power of speech:

<p>9. Sfat Emet Parshat Matot 5661 “The voice is the voice of Yaakov” refers to using our voices for Torah and prayer. This voice is without limits, brings freedom. Therefore this parshah was set for the period of “Between the Straits (limitations),” for the voice can bring us out of limitations, as it says, “I leave the straits through calling” (Tehillim 118:5 - the simple meaning is ‘I call out from the straits’). This is why we make vows in times of distress. Therefore during the period of “Between the Straits” (The Three Weeks) we should strengthen in Torah and prayer.</p>	<p>שפת אמת פרשת מטות - שנת [תרס"א] וזה "הקול קול יעקב" – קול בתורה קול בתפלה. וזה הקול הי' בחי' נחלה בלי מצרים נחלת יעקב והוא בחי' חירות. ולכן נקבע פרשה זו בין המצרים שע"י בחי' הקול יכולין לצאת מן המיצר כמ"ש "מן המיצר קראתי." וז"ש שיהיו נודרין בעת צרה. לכן בין המצרים צריכין להתחזק בתורה ותפלה.</p>
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HEAVENLY GIFTS BY RABBI SHAYA KARLINSKY

The midrash on this week's parshah (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:6) teaches us about three presents created by G d: wisdom, might, and wealth. The prophet Yirmiyahu (9:22) teaches us: אל יתהלל חכם בחכמתו, אל יתהלל הגבור – The wise man should not glorify himself with his wisdom, the mighty one with his might, or the wealthy man with his wealth. These G d given presents should not be used to glorify ourselves.

The midrash concludes that the secret of maintaining these resources is to have them as מתנות שמים, as Divine gifts, rather than something acquired through חטיפה, grabbing.

What defines the quality of our acquisitions? How do we know if they are “Divine gifts” or “grabbing”?

The answer to this question is answered – in good Jewish tradition – with another question. Why do I want to be healthy, wealthy, and wise? What is motivating the pursuit of these resources? And what do I do with them when I get them?

Our culture seems to send us a message that with these resources you can enjoy more comfort, more pleasure, more status. If that is our motivation then our acquisition is defined as חטיפה, grabbing the resources for ourselves. But if our pursuit of resources is motivated by a desire to serve G d, to radiate His Glory, to help other people; and if every resource that we acquire is then used towards those ends, they are truly מתנות שמים, they are Divine gifts. And, as the midrash teaches us, we will then have acquired חמדת העולם, gifts which fulfill the true aspirations of every person.

Their attitude to their wealth, concludes the midrash, was the mistake of the tribes of Gad and Reuven. They gave priority to their monetary needs, even if it meant being distanced from the environment of Eretz Yisrael and the rest of the Jewish People. The result was that they were the first to be sent into exile, deprived of the resources they had worked so hard to acquire.

After teaching us how we should not glorify ourselves, Yirmiyahu concludes that a person should glorify himself through השכל וידוע אותי, knowing G d and connecting with G d. Our daily activities can become opportunities to forge an intimate relationship with G d if, when He constantly provides us with our needs, we then use those presents, those resources, to glorify Him. They are then truly מתנות שמים, Divine gifts, enhancing our relationship with G d as we use them in an enduring way.

This issue is dedicated in memory of
Shayndel bat Yaacov ha'Levi (Miriam Edan), ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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