

RaYBaSH's Torah Thoughts
Parashah #42: Mattot (Tribes)
Numbers 30:2-32:42
By Rabbi Yehudah ben Shomeyr

Summary:

This week we close out the sefer (book) of B'midbar (Numbers) with a double portion. As usual here is "The Parashah in a Nutshell" from Chabad.org

Moses conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Israel. War is waged against Midian for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Israel, and the Torah gives a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the High Priest.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Menasseh) ask for the lands east of the Jordan as their portion in the Promised Land, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, but subsequently agrees on the condition that they first join, and lead, in Israel's conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

The forty-two journeys and encampments of Israel are listed, from the Exodus to their encampment on the plains of Moab across the river from the Land of Canaan. The boundaries of the Promised Land are given, and cities of refuge are designated as havens and places of exile for inadvertent murderers. The daughters of Tzelafchad marry within their own tribe of Menasseh, so that the estate which they inherit from their father should not pass to the province of another tribe.

Commentary:

I have much to say concerning this Torah portion, but for the sake of length I will save my comments for next year's portion, bli neder (without promise), and instead focus on one verse in this portion.

The Torah portion begins with the subject of oaths. This has been muddled and twisted out of context in many circles, hopefully we can clear that up in this Torah portion.

Numbers 30:2 If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.

I would like to quote the commentary from Breslov Research Institute. This commentary touched my neshamah and nefesh (spirit and soul) deeply and brought home the serious sacredness of vows.

“*Parshat Matot* speaks about vows. Through the mitzvah of making vows we can see and understand the awesome power of speech. For immediately upon expressing the vow one is obligated to fulfill the words that have left his mouth.

"For in truth, vows are an awesome *PLiAh* (wonder); 'When a man or woman *maPhLeA*. (expresses) a Nazarite vow...' (*Numbers 6:2 30:3*). This is because they manifest a wondrous wisdom, namely the greatness of a person, who has free will, who through his mouth has the ability to make for himself new mitzvot which he was not commanded.

"For example, a person may take a vow forbidding himself to eat some permissible food. Immediately, that food becomes forbidden to him as if it were explicitly written in the Torah! This is amazing. For in fact this food, in its spiritual root, is not at all forbidden. Nonetheless, immediately upon expressing his words that it be forbidden to him - even without mentioning God's name! - it becomes as forbidden to him as any full fledged Torah prohibition.

"This is an indication of how much potential a person, who has free will, has. The majority of this strength stems from one's mouth and heart. When one's heart yearns, for example, to sanctify himself with a particular type of sanctity or separation from lust, and one orally expresses that yearning, it becomes Torah. For now, that object that he has forsworn becomes prohibited to him just as those things proscribed by the Torah are prohibited,

"The reason for this is that the Jewish soul, in its root, is a *cheilek Eloka mimaal* (a part of God on high), and is itself an aspect of Torah. 'For the Holy One, Blessed be He, Torah and Israel are one' (*3 Zohar 73a*). Thus a person had the ability to take a vow and make for himself mitzvot according to his soul's desire.

"The main purpose of making a vow is to sanctify oneself and to separate oneself from the lusts of this world. This is what our Sages teach, 'Vows are a fence for abstinence' (*Avot* 3:13). Such vows are a mitzvah to make for, 'It is permitted for a person to make a vow to give his soul a boost' (*Nedarim* 20a). [Editor's note: See *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom, His Praises* #15.] Although one can make a commitment in his heart it has the power of a vow when he expresses it orally.

"People who are motivated to grow their sanctity use speech for this very powerful effect that it can have, namely, to help one overcome temptation. This is quite a curious phenomenon. For if one *can* overcome the temptation why does he need to take a vow? And if one is afraid that he *cannot* overcome the temptation what good will a vow do?

"The answer is that the vow reaches up to a very high level, *pliot chokmah*, which is the source of free will. By taking the vow a person draws extra strength which enables him to overcome the temptation. However, one still has free will and has to be very, very careful to be on guard against the temptation to stray. This is why the Torah severely warns us to keep our promises and fulfill our vows.

"The important thing to remember is that a vow gives one much more strength to overcome temptation. Thus we find Boaz said to Ruth, 'As God lives! Sleep till the morning' (*Ruth* 3:13). "'As God lives!' - Boaz swore to overcome his evil inclination" (*Ruth Rabbah* 6:4, end)." [The Midrash: "Rebbe Yehudah says, 'That entire night Boaz's evil inclination was tempting him: Your single and want to get married. She's single and wants to get married. Go "consumate" the marriage and she'll be your wife. Boaz finally swore 'As God lives! I won't touch her!'"]

So we see Vows are for the purpose of helping us to keep the 613 Mitzvot (commandments) of the Torah, and to draw us closer to G-d and His holiness for our lives.

A man who shall vow a vow (30:3)

Vows are a means to asceticism. -- Ethics of the Fathers 3:13

Ascetism leads to purity, purity leads to holiness, holiness leads to humility, humility leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to saintliness, saintliness leads to the

[possession of] the holy spirit, and the holy spirit leads to eternal life. -- Talmud, Avodah Zarah 20b

When we make a vow to G-d concerning a matter, it actually becomes Torah to us! Now that's heavy!

This is what Yeshua Moshiaynu says about vows.

Matthew 5:37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Yeshua's brother Ya'akov (James) said the same thing:

James 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

In other words don't be vague or wishy-washy, vain or flippant in making vows, rather, be specific and defined. Also in Yeshua's discourse He says not to "...Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is G-d's throne..." etc. Many people have taken what He said out of context to say that you cannot swear by G-d or on the Bible in court. This is not what Yeshua meant. Basically He meant don't swear something you can't do, (Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.) or on anyone else's reputation (G-d and His throne, City or Temple) but your own! Say what you mean and mean what you say. Don't provide for yourself loopholes.

Also, don't make a vow lightly either! Shlomo Ha Melek (King Solomon) has this wise warning and advice concerning vows:

Ecclesiastes 5:4-7 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.

Yefthah found this out the hard way:

Judges 11:30-39 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon. And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man.

The Torah Portion continues speaking of vows and how they are binding upon a woman. Provided: 1.) The woman is underage, unmarried, and or still living at home, and her father hears it, disagrees with it, and renounces the vow she has made. 2.) She is a wife and her husband hears, disagrees, and renounces it within a days (12 or 24 hour I'm not sure) time, after that he can not renounce it and it is binding upon the wife. Silence is condoning or agreeing with it.

A vow pronounced by a woman who is a widower or divorcee however is as binding upon her as it is upon a man. No one can renounce it. She must follow through with it.

Just as YHWH created all that is with His very words, and we, being created in His image also have the ability to create and destroy with our words.

Psalm 34:11-14 Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

James 3:1-12 My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

Now in Judaism there is a loophole to a vow. But is this “Biblical”? Why would we (Jews) as a people make a loophole to get out of a vow? Well, you must go to history for that. During the Pogroms, Crusades, the Holocaust, etc. Jews were

forced to make vows of various sorts or be killed. The Torah says that by the commandments you shall live (Lev.18:5), you can't keep the commandments if you are dead. So for the sake of the survival of the Jewish people and the Faith thereof, vows were made by Jews who had no intention of keeping, such as converting to another religion, or renouncing Judaism etc. Also vows may be renounced if they were made based on a lie, without having full knowledge, or having a false impression about something. In this case the fault would not be your own.

Annulment Of Vows

(based on ArtScroll Siddur)

"The Torah permits people to accept upon themselves personal obligations and prohibitions. Once made, these vows (or oaths) must be kept. There are two commandments in the Torah making it obligatory to keep such vows. The Torah, however, also provided a way to release oneself from a vow. By going to a *Beit Din* (a Rabbinical court of a local Synagogue), a court of three knowledgeable individuals, the vow can be annulled. The annulment takes place based on the decision of the court that the vow was made based on a false impression.

The prevalent custom is to convene a Beit Din after prayer services on the day before Rosh Hashanah, but, if it is forgotten or impossible for some reason, also during the days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, to nullify any vows one may have made during the year. Though this Beit Din is not meant for any actual annulment of specific vows where a real competent halachic authority should be consulted, it nonetheless represents a means of repentance from the sin of having abused vows and a nullification of any future vows made unintentionally.

The three 'judges' sit while the petitioner seeking annulment stands before them and makes a formal request for nullification." (italic mine)

The famous Jewish commentator Rashi backs this up:

And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes (30:2)

This was the procedure with all the laws that Moses taught: first he would teach them to Aaron and the heads of the tribes, and then he would instruct the people, as described in Exodus 34:31-32.

Why are the tribal heads particularly mentioned by the laws of vows? To teach us that an expert Torah scholar has the ability to annul vows like a tribunal of three laymen. -- Talmud; Rashi

“Kol Nidre (All Vows)” is a prayer said on the evening of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) renouncing vows one was compelled to make during the past year.

The official translation into English of the "Kol Nidre" (All Vows) prayer follows:

"ALL VOWS, OBLIGATIONS, OATHS, ANATHEMAS, whether called "konam," "konas," or by any other name, WHICH WE MAY VOW, OR SWEAR, OR PLEDGE, OR WHEREBY WE MAY BE BOUND, FROM THIS DAY OF ATONEMENT UNTO THE NEXT, (whose happy coming we await), we do repent. MAY THEY BE DEEMED ABSOLVED, FORGIVEN, ANNULLED, AND VOID AND MADE OF NO EFFECT; THEY SHALL NOT BIND US NOR HAVE POWERS OVER US. THE VOWS SHALL NOT BE RECKONED VOWS; THE OBLIGATIONS SHALL NOT BE OBLIGATORY; NOR THE OATHS BE OATHS." (emphasis supplied)

The implications, inferences and innuendoes of the "Kol Nidre" (All Vows) prayer are referred to in the Talmud in the Book of Nedarim, 23a-23b as follows:

(Book)

"And he who desires that NONE OF HIS VOWS MADE DURING THE YEAR SHALL BE VALID, let him stand at the beginning of the year and declare, "EVERY VOW WHICH I MAKE IN THE FUTURE SHALL BE NULL (1). (HIS VOWS ARE THEN INVALID,) PROVIDING THAT HE REMEMBERS THIS AT THE TIME OF THE VOW." (emphasis in original and supplied, Ed.)

And who says Jews no nothing of “Grace”?!

It is traditional after completing a book of Torah, in this case the book of Numbers, one says: “Chazak, chazak, v’nit’chazek (Be strong, be strong and let us be strengthened)!”

I sure hope this clears up, and helps someone who has been struggling over this issue.

This concludes the Torah portion for this week.

Until next time Shabbat Shalom and Shavuah Tov (Have a Peaceful Sabbath and a Good Week!)

--Rabbi Yehudah

RaYBaSH's Haftarah Hashings
Parashah #42: "Mattot" (Tribes)
Jeremiah 1:1-4:2
By: Rabbi Yehudah ben Shomeyr

In the final two Parashot of B'midbar (Numbers), G-d through Moshe warns Israel to utterly "drive out and wipe out" everything pagan or pay the consequences.

Num.33:51-56 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it. And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit. But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them.

And it seems the majority of the Nevi'im (Prophets) deal with the aftermath of NOT, "driving out and wiping out."

Jer.2:7 And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination.

The major principle of "drive out and wipe out" is that when you fail to do so completely, you leave bridges, no matter how small, frail and thin, for one to return to the ways that made the Land an abomination in the first place.

Just like a careless thief remembering incriminating evidence he left behind which causes him to return to the scene of the crime in a feeble attempt to either revel in his deed or to get rid of the evidence.

Just like a guy struggling with pornography, wanting to turn over a new leaf, who burned all his DVD's and Magazines, yet has an unfiltered, unsecured internet service. In most cases it's only a matter of time till he crosses that bridge he left behind.

Jer.2:11-13, 19 Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water... Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

Many criticize and condemn Judaism for building fences around the 613 Mitzvot of Torah, calling it "legalism and bondage." But with an incriminating track record of unfaithfulness left to us by the writings of the Prophets, is it no wonder that Israel took drastic measures to insure these abominable acts of unfaithfulness wouldn't happen again?

After all the Messiah implied drastic measures when he said if your right hand offends you, cut it off!

Matt. 5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast [it] from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not [that] thy whole body should be cast into hell.

If your child was a pyromaniac, wouldn't you take any measure necessary no matter how ridiculous it seemed to outsiders, to keep your child away from anything that could be used to start a fire!?

After the 2nd Temple, was destroyed you couldn't get a true Jew to participate in idolatry of any kind even if you put a knife to his throat! To this day Idolatry is virtually a non-issue in Judaism today, it is simply unheard of!

Perkei Avot 1:1b says, "...Be deliberate in judgment; develop many disciples; **and make a fence for the Torah.**"

A wise Sage later said not to make a fence so high that if it were to fall it wouldn't crush the very thing it was suppose to protect.

Yeshua Himself made fences around Torah commands when he said that if you hate someone in your heart, you have committed murder (Matt.5:21-22) and if you look at a woman to lust after her, you have committed adultery in your heart (Matt.5:27-28).

(Heb.12:1) says to lay aside all sin (and sin is breaking a Torah (the Law) command: I John 3:4) that so easily besets us.

Retake your life! Ransack, drive out and wipe and burn all bridges that can lead back to the Egypt you came from!

Shabbat Shalom and Shavuah Tov!

-- Rabbi Yehudah

RaYBaSH's Brit Chadashah Connections

Parashah #42: Mattot (Tribes)

James 1:12-16; 4:1-10

By: Rabbi Yehudah ben Shomeyr

Num.35:51-56 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it. And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit. But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them.

Upon conquest of the Promised Land, G-d gave clear, black and white instructions to “drive out and wipe out” any and all pagan inhabitation and any and all traces of their ways. If not, what they intended to do to the nations will fall back unto them. Also any trace of paganism no matter how small, would act like a bridge back to spiritual Egypt. And eventually this does happen. Israel is influenced by her Goyish neighbors and their ways and they like a camel in heat (as one of the Prophets put it) begin to chase after other gods. This idolatry is seen in G-d's eyes as spiritual adultery. Israel began “sleeping around” on the Almighty G-d. As a result many of the Prophets as Jeremiah did in our Haftarah Portion pleads with Israel to wake up and realize what she is doing, repent and turn back to the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) with all their beings!

Ya'akov (James), Yeshua's half-brother elaborates on what happens when we don't completely burn the bridges to sin.

James 1:12-16 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren.

We see a formula here; L.S.D., the spiritual drug Lust, Sin, Death. Lust = Sin = Death. How can it be anymore simple?

And whose fault is it? No ones but our own.

v.14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

Especially not G-d's!

v.13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

And when we obsess over a bridge that leads us back to Egypt we end up not even being able to pray right!

James 4:1-6 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Just as the formula to sin is simple (L.S.D.) so the formula to get back on track is even more so!

v.7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Submit = Resist = Flee

To further encourage his readers Ya'akov says:

v.8-10 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Draw close to G-d and sober up before it's too late. Humble yourself and He will put you back in right standing before Him.

Anything in your life that looks like a baited fish hook from the devil, no matter what your vice is; drive out and wipe out! Don't give the evil one that opportunity to get his foot in the door. You allow him an inch it will appear he took a foot, but really he'll take a mile! Ransack your life and conquer!

Sin will take you further than you want to go, and make you stay longer than you want to stay.

Proverbs 9:13-18 speaks of sin as a temptress inviting one into her house for a little fun. But:

v.18 But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.

Remember Ha Satan only comes to kill. Steal, and destroy (John 10:10), The Messiah has come to give life and give it to the fullest (John 10:10)!

Choose Life!

Shabbat Shalom and Shavuah Tov!
-- Rabbi Yehudah

