

THE NUMBER FORTY-TWO

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Parshios Matos & Masei

The Number Forty-Two

Matot-Masei

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Today's Learning:

Bava Metzia 3:9-10

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 72

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Rosh Hashanah 4

The second of this week's two parashot opens with a list of the 42 places where Bnei Yisrael camped during their forty years in the desert. Why does the Torah list all of these places? R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; 14th century) offers several reasons:

- (1) Rashi writes that this list shows Hashem's kindness. Without this list, we might have thought that Bnei Yisrael were traveling constantly. However, now we know that they averaged almost one year in each place.
- (2) The 42 places allude to the Divine Name having 42 letters, with which Hashem created grasses, trees, and springs at every stop.
- (3) Rambam writes that the places are listed to highlight the miracles that Hashem did in the desert. Without this list, we might have thought that Bnei Yisrael's travels kept them in inhabited areas so that they had easy access to food, water and other supplies. However, now we know that they traveled in wilderness areas. [Ed. note: Rambam's answer, as well as the next answer, assumes that we can identify these places. In Chazal's time, many of these places were in fact known.]
- (4) The Midrash says that we need to know where Bnei Yisrael camped so that, if we happen to visit those places, we can recite the blessing, "Who performed a miracle for my ancestors at this place."

R' Ibn Shuiv notes that the above explanations help to tie our haftarah to the parashah. In the haftarah, Yirmiyah rebukes the nation for forgetting Hashem's many acts of kindness. (Derashot Ibn Shuiv)

From the Parashah . . .

"Moshe was angry with the commanders of the army . . ." (31:14)

R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the "Alter of Kelm"; died 1898) developed a strategy to never to lose his temper. He had a special jacket that he had set aside to wear when he was angry. He said, "When I feel anger coming on, I know that I have to get my special jacket. But, by the time I do, I am no longer angry." (Quoted in Ve'karata La'Shabbat Oneg)

"Elazar Hakohen said to the men of the legion who came to the battle, 'This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe'." (Bemidbar 31:21)

Rashi z"l explains why Elazar taught this law: "Because Moshe came to anger (see verse 14), he came to err. Specifically, the laws concerning the removal of uncleanness absorbed by vessels which had contained the food of heathens escaped him."

R' Yisrael Avraham Portugal shlita (the Skulener Rebbe in Brooklyn) asks: This seems inconsistent with Rashi's explanation of the last phrase in the verse: "Which Hashem commanded Moshe -- he (Elazar) associated the decision with his teacher." Did Elazar learn this law from Moshe, or did he not?

R' Portugal explains as follows:

We read in Pirkei Avot (Ch. 6) that a person must honor anyone from whom he has learned Torah. The proof for this is that David showed great respect to Achitophel, from whom, the mishnah says, "David had learned only two things alone." Asked R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (founder of the chassidic movement; died 1760): the mishnah seems to be redundant when it says, "David had learned *only* two things *alone*." The explanation is that when a tzaddik teaches Torah, he not only teaches the specific lesson he is imparting at that moment, but he also disseminates and increases the holy light of Torah in the world. That light thereafter enables his students to discover additional Torah insights that their teacher never spoke.

This is only true, explained the Ba'al Shem Tov, of a tzaddik. The Biblical figure Achitophel was, however, wicked. Although he twice taught Torah to King David, he taught *only* those two lessons *alone*. His teaching did not have the ability to increase the light of Torah in the world.

This, concluded R' Portugal, explains the seemingly contradictory statements of Rashi. Moshe had not taught the laws of tevilat kailim / immersing vessels to Elazar directly. Nevertheless, it was Moshe's teachings that made Elazar's knowledge possible. (Introduction to his father's Noam Eliezer)

From the Haftarah . . .

"Hear the word of Hashem, O House of Yaakov and all families of the House of Yisrael. Thus said Hashem, 'What wrong did your forefathers find in Me, that they distanced themselves from Me and went after nothingness, and have turned into nothingness? But they did not say, "Where is Hashem, Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, Who led us in the Wilderness, in a land of plain and pit, in a land of waste and the shadow of death, in a land through which no man has passed and where no man has settled." Yet I brought you to a fruitful Land, to eat its fruit and its goodness; but when you came, you contaminated My Land, and made My heritage into an abomination'." (Yirmiyah 2:4-8)

R' Dr. Yosef Breuer z"l (1882-1980; rabbi of K'hal Adath Jeshurun / "Breuer's" in Frankfurt, Germany and later Manhattan) writes: "What wrong has G-d done to you?" the prophet asks Yisrael in bitter, reproachful words. G-d's people have turned their backs on Him. The prophet sees this alienation above all in the fact that G-d and his mitzvot are no longer the central influence in their lives. And yet the question, "Where is G-d?" is the one that should dominate all of life. Divine law seeks to encompass within its purifying and hallowing rules every expression of thought and emotion, every creative action. For when we were established as a nation in Egypt, G-d became the Master exercising total dominion over our lives. He brought us up from Egypt -- the verb used is not "took us up" but "brought us up" -- which implies a moral elevation from past corruption. He raised us up from Egyptian depravity, and His sacred maxims of life as set down in the Torah are intended to protect us from such depravity at all times. Beyond that, during the 40 years which the Jewish People spent in the wilderness, G-d proved to be the absolute guarantor of their physical well-being, assuring their miraculous survival in an environment which seemingly offered no chance of existence.

It was for a life ennobled by pure morality that Yisrael's political independence was to serve as a basis, linking spiritual and moral growth with material prosperity. Given such a G-d-ordained ideal, of what wrong could Yisrael possibly accuse Him?

Yet, the prophet sees that the question "Where is Hashem?" -- which should accompany and dominate every phase of human life -- is no longer asked. Instead, the ideal of taharah, the sanctification of life which was the purpose for which he brought us up from Egypt, which clearly acknowledges the G-d-ordained moral dignity of every man, and which calls upon man to rise, of his own free will, above all physical and animal bondage, the prophet beholds the threat of tumah (impurity), the delusion which drags the human personality into the sphere of the unfree, restricted world of nature, depriving Yisrael of its hallowed and moral character, and robbing it of all the ideals it attained through the Exodus. And so, foreseeing the disastrous consequences of Yisrael's moral decline, the prophet calls out, "you contaminated My Land!"

R' Breuer continues: When we cease our efforts to fulfill the purpose for which He brought us up from Egypt, when we no longer acknowledge G-d as the Source of the moral sanctity of our lives,

we will also forget that G-d "led us in the Wilderness," that He guarantees our enduring physical survival. At that point, man, deprived of all his ideals, looks only to himself, to his strength and to his own ability to master the world, for the attainment of material prosperity. A world dominated by such men becomes increasingly alienated from its primary allegiance to G-d. Such is the estrangement (verse 5) that has come between G-d and Yisrael. (Sefer Yirmiyah: Translation and Commentary)

Diaries

This week, we present another excerpt from Eleh Masei, subtitled "A Journal of the Journey of the Rabbis, Members of the Committee to Raise the Crown of Judaism in Our Holy Land, Who Toured All the Settlements of Shomron [Samaria] and Galil [Galilee] in the Winter of 5674 [1914]."

Tuesday, 25 Marcheshvan. In the morning, we traveled to Merchaviah. We prayed Shacharit on the train. The rabbi of Yaffo [R' Kook], being a kohen, recited Birkat Kohanim [the Priestly Blessing, which is recited daily in Eretz Yisrael, unlike in the diaspora, where it is recited only on holidays]. The Arabs who were on the train stood up from their seats during the blessing. After the rabbi of Yaffo concluded Birkat Kohanim, they asked about the nature of this prayer. Rabbi Horowitz [this diary's author] explained to them that the kohen prays for the People and the Land.

The rabbis were met at the train station by wagons and two workers astride horses.

The manager [of the settlement], Mr. Dick, received the rabbis politely. Since he had been awaiting their arrival since last week, he had already purchased 14 mezuzot and affixed them on the doors of his office, the infirmary, and the cafeteria even before the rabbis arrived.

The kitchen is not kosher . . .

In the communal farm, there are approximately 50 male workers and ten female workers. We spoke with Mr. Dick, who agreed to have ma'aser taken from the produce. Immediately, R' Ben Zion Yadler separated terumah and ma'aser, which came to approximately 120 Francs. . . .

[In the evening,] terrible news reached us; in Deganiah and Kinneret two young workers from among our brethren were murdered - Moshe Barsky and Yosef Saltzman. The rabbis were asked to conduct a service in their memory.

After Ma'ariv, all the young people gathered, and R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld [later rabbi of the Eidah Ha'chareidit] eulogized the victims. He based words of mussar on the verse (Devarim 21:7), "Our hands did not spill this blood." [Ed. note: Our Sages interpret this verse as placing some blame on the entire community when a murder occurs.] Emotions ran high. After the eulogy, the rabbis recited Av Ha'rachamim. Then R' Sonnenfeld recited Kel Malei and Kaddish.

[In another work, quoted in a footnote to the 5761 / 2001 edition of Eleh Masei, an eyewitness provided more details about R' Sonnenfeld's eulogy: "R' Sonnenfeld paced among us, mournful and

broken-hearted. He gathered us together and gave a pained eulogy for the holy and pure soul whose life was cut short by murderers. His heartbreak was great, and he cried bitter tears for the young lives that were stolen from us. He called on us to awaken, and to combine our strength, so that we might merit the complete redemption."]

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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