

A QUESTION OF FAITH

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

This week's double Parsha of Matos - Masai concludes the fourth book of the Torah, Sefer Bamidbar. As Rav Hirsch explained, Sefer Bamidbar details the trials of the Jewish people as they attempted to integrate G-d's law into their lives. In essence it is an account of the years in the desert from after the Giving of the Torah concluding at the border of Eretz Yisroel (land of Israel). The last book of the Torah, Sefer Divarim (Deuteronomy) covers the last month of Moshe's life and the laws, new and old, needed to ease the nation's transition from the miraculous existence in the desert to the relative norms of living in the Promised Land.

The end of Matos details the special arrangements initiated by the tribes of Reuven and Gad. They had approached Moshe requesting permission to settle in the trans-Jordan lands of Sichon and Og. The intention was to immediately annex the trans-Jordan area making it part of Israel. Moshe was first very critical of their request but afterwards presented the deal of granting them permission in exchange for taking the point guard in the conquest of Israel. Reuven and Gad agreed and they were able to settle their families and herds in the lush pastures of the trans-Jordan.

What lessons can we learn from this story, especially considering its placement at the near end of Sefer Bamidbar? Clearly, G-d wanted the lessons of the story to linger in the minds of the nation as they prepared to leave the desert and enter the Promised Land. Furthermore, why did Moshe insist that half the tribe of Menashe join Reuven and Gad in their chosen location? Why compound the problem by asking others to make the same mistake if at first the idea deserved criticism?

The end of this week's second Parsha, Masai, concludes the Book of Bamidbar with the endnotes on the Daughters of Tzlaphchad. In last week's Parsha they asked Moshe if they would inherit their father's estate. Moshe informed them that the law provided for the inheritance of a daughter in the absence of sons and they would inherit their father's intended portion of the Promised Land. At the very end of this week's Parsha, the elders of Menashe approached Moshe concerned that Tzlaphchad's properties would eventually transfer out of the tribe's ownership in the event that one of the Daughters married outside the tribe. Moshe informed the nation that the transfer of ancestral property to a daughter restricted that daughter from marrying outside her tribe thereby maintaining the tribal divisions of the land. The Torah records that the Daughters of Tzlaphchad married their uncles and stayed within the tribe of Menashe. (Note that the ruling was only for that one generation.)

What lessons can we learn from the fact that the endnotes of the Daughters of Tzlapchad conclude Sefer Bamidbar and the record of the 40 years in the desert? Is there a relationship between the Daughters of Tzlapchad who were from the tribe of Menashe and the deal made by Moshe with the tribes of Reuven and Gad? Is there more than a coincidence in the fact that the ½ tribe sent to accompany Reuven and Gad in trans-Jordan just happened to also be Shayvet (tribe of) Menashe?

In Parshas B'Haloscha, Moshe informed Yisro (his Father-in-law) that they were preparing to leave Sinai and enter Eretz Yisroel. Yisro responded that he preferred to return to his own land of origin rather than go with them to Israel. The Ramban explains that Yisro really meant that if he was not going to inherit a portion of land (Yisro was a convert to Judaism) he preferred to return to Midian and teach the non-Jews of Midian rather than go with the Jews to Israel. In past issues I explained that Yisro was not simply being difficult or demanding. It was not a financial consideration that bothered Yisro. Yisro understood that the land of Israel was necessary for the Jewish people to accomplish their mission as "a light unto the nations." The land was a tool no different than individual wealth or talent. If he was not going to be given a portion of the land it was clear that G-d did not consider it necessary for him to be landed in order to fulfill his personal mission in life. Therefore, he would return to the place he knew best and the people with whom he was most familiar and teach them the ways and truths of G-d.

As the nation approached the borders of Eretz Yisroel and the fulfillment of G-d's promise to the forefathers, the practicalities of life began to surface. How much land will each individual receive? How will the land be divided between the various tribes? What will happen to the ancestral borders if daughter inherit their fathers and marry husbands from other tribes? What do we do with all our cattle if G-d should give us a portion of land better suited for agriculture than husbandry?

The truth is that the questions being posed at the end of the 40 years in the desert were not any more agreeable to G-d than the concerns raised by the nation 40 years earlier at the time of the Spies. In both instances the questions seemed to reflect on a lack of faith and trust in G-d. Whether issues of strategy and warfare, or land divisions and pastureland, the assumption should have been that G-d would provide the nation, the tribes, and each individual with exactly what they needed. If the tribes of Reuven and Gad happen to have large herds requiring pastureland one of two things should have happened. Either they would discover that their allotted portion in the Promised Land was sufficient for their needs; or, they would have to adjust their holdings to accommodate their apportioned section. The notion of asking to annex the trans-Jordan area to better accommodate their cattle holdings suggested a lack of trust and faith in G-d. That is why Moshe's immediate response to their request was to accuse them of doing the same thing that the Spies had done! (31:10-16)

However, the daughter's of Tzlapchad were the perfect contrast to the request of Reuven and Gad. They willingly placed their personal destinies in the hands of G-d's law. Whatever Moshe would rule

in their case they would accept. Had Moshe ruled that they would not inherit their father's portion of land they would have accepted G-d's decree. To their benefit G-d informed Moshe that they could and would inherit their father's portion. However, at the end of Bamidbar (Numbers) they were informed that it was conditional on their not marrying outside of the tribe of Menashe. That too they accepted unquestioningly as the law of G-d. For the Daughters of Tzlaphchad, G-d's law defined what was in their best interest. If it wasn't G-d's wish it could not be to their benefit. If it was G-d's wish it had to be for their benefit. Beyond G-d's law there were no other expectations or needs.

When Reuven and Gad approached Moshe they assumed that they had a need that had not been taken into account by G-d. (32:16) "Pens for the flocks shall we build and cities for our small children." The tribes of Reuven and Gad were gifted with large herds of cattle that required pastureland. In considering the size of the nation and the smallness of the Promised Land, the tribes felt that they were better off staying on the east bank of the Jordan where ample pastureland was available. However, in doing so they also established a distance and barrier between themselves and the rest of the nation. It meant that they would, to some extent, be on their own in dealing with the neighboring countries. It meant that a degree of the intensity of the Jewish experience in the land of Israel would be compromised. The other option for them was, as mentioned previously, to accept that whatever the land situation would be after they entered the Promised Land would be exactly what G-d wished for them. By definition, that had to be the best thing for them and their children.

Moshe was concerned about the request for two reasons.

- 1.** He recognized that they had put their finances before their children. This is indicated by the order in which the tribes asked for the trans-Jordan lands and Moshe's response to them. They first stated that they wanted to build pens for their cattle and then cities for their children. ((32:16) Moshe answered by first stating they would build cities for their children and then pens for their cattle (32:24).
- 2.** He was concerned that their self-imposed distance would be too great a challenge for them. Inevitably, their level of devotion and commitment would be compromised. Therefore, Moshe insisted that ½ the tribe of Menashe join Reuven and Gad in settling the trans-Jordan lands.

Menashe was the oldest of Yoseph's two sons. We are told that he was the "translator" at the time of Yoseph's encounter with his brothers. We are further told that Menashe was the one who spent more time with his father in issues of government and administration. Ephraim, on the other hand, appears to have been more involved in scholarly pursuits. I believe that we can conclude that Menashe was better trained to withstand the influences of the non-Jewish world than his brother Ephraim.

I would like to suggest that Moshe attached Menashe to the tribes of Reuven and Gad because Menashe had the qualities of his father in surviving alone among the nations. It was Yoseph who remained so connected to the teachings of Yakov that he not only maintained his own level of

righteousness, he was even able to raise his sons to such devotion that Yakov said, (Ber.48:5) "Ephraim and Menashe are to me like Reuven and Shimon!" To make sure that Reuven and Gad would maintain their levels of commitment and devotion in spite of being away from the rest of the nation Moshe sent ½ the tribe of Menashe to support them and protect them. Furthermore, as we saw from the Daughters of Tzlaphchad, the tribe of Menashe was endowed with a special love for Eretz Yisroel (Rashi 27:1). The love of Menashe for Eretz Yisroel would balance out the self-imposed distance of Gad and Reuven.

(Question: What rational motivated Gad and Reuven to even ask?)

The lesson of the end of Bamidbar is very obvious. Eretz Yisroel is ours because G-d gave it to us to use in His service. We must trust that He provided us with all the necessary tools to accomplish our individual and collective missions. Adjusting G-d's plan to fit our concept of what we need or what should be stems from a lack of faith in G-d and the acceptance that whatever we have is exactly what we need. It wasn't by coincidence that the daughter's of Tzlaphchad were born into the tribe of Menashe and that Menashe was the tribe Moshe trusted to balance out his concerns for the tribes of Reuven and Gad.

The Nine Days

The Nine days begin on Rosh Chodesh Av, Sunday evening July 18th, and end Wednesday afternoon, July 28. This interval of time imitates the period of "shiva" with some of its restrictions.

1. Washing and Cleaning Clothing:

It is forbidden to wash or iron clothing during the 9 Days even if done by a non-Jew. You may give clothing to the cleaners before the 9 Days even if they will be cleaned during the 9 Days. However, one may not pick up the clothing until after the 9 Days.

2. Freshly laundered clothing:

It is forbidden to wear new or freshly laundered clothing during the 9 Days, except for undergarments and socks. All garments to be worn during the 9 Days should be worn for a short time before the 9 Days begin. If clothing becomes soiled and you do not have a clean change, you may wash only that which you need. Children's clothing that constantly get dirty may be washed during the 9 Days. Bed linens should not be washed or changed, except when truly needed. Purchasing new clothing, even if they will first be worn after the 9 Days, is forbidden. Sewing and all types of alterations are not allowed during the 9 Days. If needed, minor tears and buttons may be mended.

3. Eating Meat, Chicken and drinking wine:

Eating meat or chicken is prohibited during the 9 Days. Drinking wine or grape juice is also

prohibited. These prohibitions do not extend to Shabbos or a Seudat Mitzvah such as a Bris, Pidyon Haben or Siyum. The custom is to have a young child drink the wine from Havdalah; however, if there is no young child, the one making Havdalah may drink.

4. Bathing and washing:

Among the more difficult restrictions to keep during the 9 Days is the prohibition against washing and bathing. Being that we are imitating the period of "Shiva", the expected attitude is one that "does not care" due to the enormity of the loss suffered. It is obvious that the Rabbis wanted us to act as if we are affected by the absence of the Bais Hamikdash in a manner that reflects a deep sense of loss in our relationship with G-d. Our culture, much more so than other cultures, places a priority on personal hygiene - the Halacha takes this into account.

The criterion established by the Halacha is: bathing for pleasure vs. bathing for necessity. The degree of "necessity" changes from person to person, so the Halacha expects some modification in our personal hygiene depending on the individual. Saunas, steam rooms, swimming, and other forms of pleasurable bathing activities are prohibited during the 9 Days for every one. Small children are permitted to swim, bathe, etc.; however, we are especially vigilant during this period of time in supervising any activity that might contain risk.

Each of us must seriously assess our level of "necessity"; however, everyone can take a quick, lukewarm shower, rather than a leisurely hot one, and still accommodate our "need to be clean". Women preparing for the Mikvah are permitted to do so in the usual manner.

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