

The Path to Follow

**PARSHA
MATOT MASEI**

JULY 18TH, 2015
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604



DEMONSTRATING EVEN GREATER UNITY DURING THE MONTH OF AV

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

Parsha Masei is generally read around the time of Rosh Chodesh Av, and the Mishnah in Taanith 26b states: "With the beginning of Av, rejoicing is curtailed." This is contrary to the month of Adar, of which it is said: "With the beginning of Adar, rejoicing is increased" (Taanith 29a), because it is an auspicious month for Israel. Rashi explains, "Jews experienced miraculous days, Purim and Pesach," since they willingly accepted the Torah, which brought them radiant joy, contentment, cheerfulness, and honor. Conversely, rejoicing diminishes with the arrival of Av, for on account of our sins the Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred. Now the fact that it has not been rebuilt proves that baseless hatred still exists among us, which is what should trouble us. Our Sages say, "Every generation that does not build [the Temple], it is as though it has destroyed it" (Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:1).

In reality we should always experience joy, even if just a little, for we need joy in order to serve G-d. King David said, "Serve Hashem with joy; come before Him with joyous song" (Tehillim 100:2), and the Gemara teaches: "The Divine Presence rests [upon] man neither through sadness nor sloth... but only through joy in connection with a mitzvah" (Shabbat 30b). It is also written, "Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amid joy and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant, so will you serve your enemies" (Devarim 28:47-48). Nevertheless we diminish our rejoicing during that time, for we are obligated to afflict ourselves due to the punishment we deserve for having fostered baseless hatred and division among ourselves, and for having served G-d without enthusiasm. We also find in this week's parsha an allusion to the concept of unity. It is written, "They journeyed from Haradah and encamped in Makhelot. They journeyed from Makhelot and encamped in Tahat" (Bamidbar 33:25-26). The names of these places are not random; they are connected to what our ancestors experienced there. Thus the name Haradah evokes the fear of G-d, for a man filled with divine fear is known as fearing (hared) the word of G-d. Their fear of Hashem united them, which is what the name Makhelot refers to: They gathered together (nikalu) and were united, for whoever fears G-d is careful not to harm others, thus assuring unity among the people. This is why G-d protected the honor of their fellowmen and brought unity among the people. Now when we live together in harmony, we yield to others and peace reigns among us. Hence the verse continues the account of their journeys by saying, "They journeyed from Makhelot and encamped in Tahat" – implying that they agreed to yield (lihyot

tahat) to one another. In our days, the Jewish people must acquire these virtues in order to rid themselves of baseless hatred and merit the Final Redemption. Yielding, which is what the term tahat refers to, is essential for the continued existence of the Jewish community. Without it, disputes can erupt at any moment. After the destruction of the Second Temple, a great city by the name of Beitar, located near Jerusalem, was still resisting Roman forces. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beitar did not chase out the Samaritans, who eventually wronged them, as stated in the Midrash: "A Samaritan went and found [Emperor Hadrian] and said, 'My lord, so long as that old cock [a reference to the famous Rabbi Elazar, who wore sackcloth and fasted in order to prevent Beitar from being destroyed] wallows in ashes, you will not conquer the city. But wait for me, because I will do something that will enable you to subdue it today'" (Eicha Rabba 2:4). His strategy was successful, and the Gemara (Gittin 57a) relates that the Romans did not hesitate to kill men, women, and children in Beitar until their blood actually ran into the Mediterranean some four miles away. The Midrash adds, "The skulls of 300 children [were dashed] upon one stone, and 300 baskets of boxes for tefillin were found in Beitar...with a total weight of three hundred seahs" (Eicha Rabba 2:4). This begs the question: Why did these children die? Were they guilty of anything? After all, it is written: "Sons shall not be put to death because of fathers" (Devarim 24:16)! In this case, Beitar's inhabitants were opposed to those of Jerusalem. Why was Beitar destroyed? Because their inhabitants lit candles to celebrate the destruction of the Temple. Our Sages teach, "See how grave strife is! In fact the earthly court only punishes sinners starting from the age of 13, and the celestial court waits until the age of 20. Yet here, even infants were killed!" (Tanchuma, Korach 3). This also occurred during Korach's rebellion, as it is written: "with their wives, children, and infants" (Bamidbar 16:27). As a result, since the inhabitants of Beitar were not united with the rest of the Jewish people, and since they wanted to enter into a separate covenant with the other nations, they received a harsh and bitter punishment.

Likewise Rabbi Akiva's disciples, who were tzadikim, suffered a terrible death because they failed to show respect for one another. Now if a person fails to respect others, he will eventually despise and ultimately hate them. I see this in everyday life, for at first we welcome others warmly, but as time goes by we neglect to greet them or we say a cold hello. Eventually we don't say hello at all, and then one day we detest them and become their enemy!

According to what we have said, we can better understand why Jacob made a covenant with

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**Rabbi David Hanania
Pinto Shlita**
CHEVRAT PINTO
207 West 78th Street
New York - NY 10024
Tel: 1 212 721 0230
www.hevratpinto.org
hevratpinto@aol.com
Editor-in-Chief:
Hanania Soussan

Lavan, as it is written: “So now, come, let us make a covenant, I and you” (Bereshith 31:44). This was actually a covenant of separation, as we read: “This heap is a witness and this monument is a witness, that I will not cross over this heap to you, and that you will not cross over this heap and this monument to me for evil” (v.52). They went their separate ways from that point on, never seeing one another again. The

Ben Ish Hai explains (Parsha Vayeitzei) that contrary to covenants of peace with the nations of the world, this type of covenant is permitted.

May we merit to increase our unity, banish baseless hatred from among ourselves, and merit the Final Redemption and rebuilding of the Temple, soon and in our days. Amen!

The Words of the Sages

Overcoming Anger

There are three instances in the Torah where we find that Moshe became angry and a halachah escaped him as a result.

One of these instances occurs in this week’s parsha, when the Children of Israel went to fight Midian. Upon their return from battle, Moshe became angry when he learned that the soldiers had allowed all the Midianite women to live, contrary to what was expected of them. Thus we read, “Moshe was angry with the commanders of the army, the officers of the thousands and the officers of the hundreds, who came from the legion of the battle” (Bamidbar 31:14).

The gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz says without hesitation that Moshe’s anger in the battle against Midian was justified. In fact the goal of this battle was to avenge G-d against the Midianites, who had laid a trap for Israel by means of its women. Leaving these very same women alive was therefore tantamount to laying the very same trap among the Jewish people.

Although Moshe’s anger was justified, and despite his great piety, Moshe – the leader of Israel – was nevertheless punished by forgetting certain halachot. For what reason? In reality, the fact that a person forgets things when he becomes angry is not a punishment. Rather, it is the natural consequence of anger, which harms a person’s ability to reason. Hence whether anger is justified or not, a person who becomes enraged is deprived of his own reasoning abilities. Thus even Moshe, who demonstrated his jealousy for Hashem’s honor and who was only trying to protect the Children of Israel from sin, was not saved from the destructive consequences of his anger.

In the Gemara we read: “Resh Lakish said, ‘As for every man who becomes angry: If he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him. If he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him – [We learn this] from Moshe, for it is written: “Moshe was angry with the commanders of the army” [Bamidbar 31:14]. And it is written, “Eleazar the kohen said to the men of the legion who had come to the battle: This is the decree of the Torah that Hashem commanded Moshe...” [v.21]. From here it follows that it had become hidden from Moshe’” (Pesachim 66b).

To defeat the anger that sometimes overcomes us, Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz advises us to meditate on the words of our Sages, who have condemned this character trait at length: “He who loses his temper is exposed to all the torments of Gehinnom” (Nedarim 22a) and, “He who loses his temper, even the Shechinah is unimportant in his eyes. ... He forgets his learning and grows even more foolish” (ibid. 22b).

Apparent Anger

We have a great deal to learn from the conduct of the great men of Israel, from their noble character traits and great diligence in distancing themselves from anger.

In his writings, Rabbi Haim Vital, one of the main disciples of the Arizal, was highly critical of anger and testified to the conduct of his teacher:

“My teacher was more careful in regard to anger than any other transgression, even when it concerned the fulfillment of a mitzvah. Even when I taught my brother, and I was disappointed and irritated by his learning, my teacher would warn and strongly rebuke me. He justified his viewpoint by saying, ‘All other sins harm but a bodily member, whereas anger harms the entire soul.’”

It is said that not even a trace of anger or resentment could be found in Rabbi Israel Lipkin of Salant, known as the “father of the Mussar movement.” He was especially careful to completely uproot any feelings of annoyance from his heart, and he would often say: “Almost all transgressions committed between one man and another stem from resentment and inflexibility.”

No one ever saw Rabbi Israel Lipkin becoming upset or angry, despite his very emotional and sensitive character. He had uprooted all feelings of resentment and animosity from his heart, emotions that no longer concerned him. If someone harmed or irritated him, not only would he let it go and forgive the person, he would also hasten to do something good for him!

According to Rabbi Israel Lipkin, the order to never become angry is included in the Torah commandment to “walk in His ways,” meaning that we must cleave to Hashem’s middot and emulate them. When we arouse G-d’s anger, He is not just forbearing, but continues to grant us life and satisfy our needs and desires.

It happened that Rabbi Israel Lipkin would appear to become angry in public so as to reprimand an individual or group. However his anger was only apparent and fake.

Some people even noticed that in the midst of his “fury,” he would turn towards a wall and whisper, “Apparent anger, not anger from the heart.”

It is said that Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm committed himself to never becoming angry until he put on a special garment, which was reserved for this very purpose. As for the mashgiach Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, he affirmed that he never punished his children or anyone else at the time of their fault, lest his rebuke be tainted by anger. He therefore waited until he was sure that he had banished all resentment from his heart toward the person in question, and only then would he reprimand him.

Tasting Leaven and Honey

Still on this subject, the Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef, Rabbi Yehuda Tsadka, would usually explain the verse, “You shall not cause to [go up in] smoke any leaven or any honey” (Vayikra 2:11) in relation to anger. Thus he said that “leaven” alludes to an angry face, an irritable look. As for “honey,” it evokes sweetness and pleasure.

Thus anyone who seeks to attain perfection must inspire himself from the leaven and display an angry expression at the right time, meaning when he confronts sinners. However he must also have a jovial appearance and speak gently with those who fulfill the Creator’s will. On the other hand, in regard to a person who is “all leaven,” meaning someone who is constantly annoyed and angry, even with those who observe Torah and mitzvot – or someone who is “all honey,” acting gently even with those who have abandoned Hashem’s way – the text says: “You shall not cause to [go up in] smoke.”

The Ways of Providence

It is written, “He shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen Gadol, whom he anointed with the sacred oil” (Bamidbar 35:25).

The Gemara says the following in regard to this verse: “Was it he [the killer] who anointed the Kohen Gadol? However the reference is to the Kohen Gadol who was anointed in his [the killer’s] days” (Makkot 11b).

A question arises: Why does the verse not just say: “until the death of the Kohen Gadol, who was anointed with the sacred oil”?

The gaon Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, author of *Meshech Chochma*, answers this question by stating that this verse is alluding to the ways of divine providence: Someone is appointed as Kohen Gadol because of the destiny of another person – someone who killed unintentionally – for Heaven has decreed how long this killer must remain in a city of refuge, and thus divine providence chose a Kohen Gadol whose lifespan would correspond to the length of the killer’s exile.

It is therefore accurate for the verse to state, “He shall dwell in it until the death of the Kohen Gadol, whom he anointed with the sacred oil,” for divine providence decreed that the killer is the one who caused the Kohen Gadol to be anointed!

This Great Calamity

It is written, “After the death of the Kohen Gadol, the murderer shall return to the land of his possession” (Bamidbar 35:28).

The verse calls him a “murderer” even after he has been punished by exile to a city of refuge. The book *Siftei Cohen* explains that this accords with what the Rambam writes concerning the killer who is exiled to a city of refuge: “Although the killer has gained atonement, he should never return to a position of authority that he previously held. Instead, he should be diminished in stature for his entire life, because of this great calamity that he caused” (Hilchot Rotzeach 7:14).

Hence the verse uses the expression “murderer” to teach us that although he has repented and his sin has been forgiven, he must personally recognize that he is a “murderer.”

Thinking About Sin

It is written, “Not a man among us is missing” (Bamidbar 31:49).

The Ramban writes that this is very surprising, being among the great miracles that Israel experienced, including here in the war against Midian. The Midianites were as numerous as the sand of the sea, and yet the Children of Israel killed and captured thousands upon thousands of them. The verse testifies that not a single Jew fell in battle: “Not a man among us is missing.”

If we ask what earned them this miracle, the Ramban explains that it took place on account of their merit. This is what our Sages have explained: “Moshe said to Israel: ‘Perhaps you have returned to your first lapse [sin]?’ They replied, ‘Not a man among us is missing [i.e., no man has left to commit a sin].’ Moshe asked, ‘If so, why bring an offering?’ They said, ‘Although we have escaped from sin, we did not escape from thinking about sin’” (Shabbat 64a).

Under the Same Laws

It is written, “Let this land be given to your servants as a heritage; do not bring us across the Jordan” (Bamidbar 32:5).

Some have asked why the children of Gad and Reuven waited until after the war with Midian to ask for land on the other side of the Jordan. After all, they could have made this request after the wars with Sihon and Og!

In his book *Chatam Sofer*, Rabbi Moshe Sofer follows the Rambam in stating that the Children of Israel were commanded to kasher their vessels only after the war with Midian, not after the wars with Sihon and Og. This is because the land of Sihon and Og was under the same law (halachically

speaking) as the land of Israel. During the conquest of the land of Israel, non-kosher vessels were permissible, not having to be kashered.

Therefore, says the *Chatam Sofer*, after receiving the order to kasher their vessels following the war with Midian, the children of Gad and Reuven realized that the territories of Sihon and Og were under the same law as the land of Israel. Hence they came and asked, “Let this land be given to your servants as a heritage.”

In the Light of the Parsha

A Sin for Which Yom Kippur Cannot Atone

It is written, “The children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and said to Moshe... ‘If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage. Do not bring us across the Jordan.’ Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven, ‘Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?’” (Bamidbar 32:2-6).

This is surprising, for why did Moshe not let the children of Gad and Reuven finish telling him what they wanted? Instead, he interrupted and reprimanded them! Could Moshe have possibly thought that they did not want to enter the land of Israel, and that on the contrary they wanted to rebel against Hashem just as their fathers had rebelled?

This passage, which is always read between Tammuz 17 and Av 9, is connected to the destruction of the Temple, and we must learn a lesson from it. Elsewhere the Sages have said, “Why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they [Jews] were occupied with Torah, mitzvot, and acts of charity? Because baseless hatred was prevalent” (Yoma 9b).

We must always focus more attention on our relationships with other people than on our relationship with G-d. Thus when we repent of the sins we have committed against G-d, they are forgiven on Yom Kippur. However even if we confess and repent of the sins we have committed against other people, they are not forgiven on Yom Kippur unless the people we have sinned against have forgiven us first (Yoma 85b). Hence during the time of the Temple, G-d forgave the sins committed against Him, but not those committed against other people. Furthermore, the Sages have said that the land of Israel is only acquired through hardship (Berachot 5a), the result being that Moshe did not immediately annex the territories of Sihon and Og to Israel because, unlike Israel, they were not acquired through hardship. When the children of Gad and Reuven said to Moshe, “Do not bring us across the Jordan,” he concluded that they did not want to confront such hardships at the same time as the rest of the Children of Israel, preferring instead to settle in the territories of Sihon and Og without difficulty. Hence Moshe immediately interrupted them by saying, “Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?” In other words: “Do you think you can remain here in peace without any difficulty while your fellow Jews confront hardships in the land of Israel?” The expression, “Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here” teaches us that Moshe was afraid that peace was lacking among them, for there is no greater gulf among people than not being concerned with their pain.

The children of Gad and Reuven immediately responded to Moshe: “We shall arm ourselves swiftly before the Children of Israel until we have brought them to their place, and our small children will dwell in fortified cities before the inhabitants of the land” (Bamidbar 32:17).

However since they formulated their request incorrectly by saying, “Do not bring us across the Jordan,” the Holy One, blessed be He, punished them. When Sennacherib later exiled the Ten Tribes, the tribes of Gad and Reuven were the first to go into exile. Why? Because it was unnecessary for them to say, “Do not bring us across the Jordan,” which seemed to indicate that they did not want to share the difficulties of the other tribes. Since they used this expression, they were the first to be punished.

In his book *Kesef Nivchar* (first commentary on Parsha Masei), Rabbi Yoshiyahu interpreted the verse, “Moshe wrote their starting places [motza’eihem] for their journeys according to the word of Hashem” (Bamidbar 33:2) as follows: If our expenses (hotzaot) are destined for our journey to the World to Come, meaning that we content ourselves with only essentials in terms of food and clothing, then we are acting “according to the word of Hashem.” The expression, “their starting places [motza’eihem] for their journeys” means that the goal of our journeys and travels must only be to pay for our obligatory expenses (hotzaot), not to seek a life of luxury and wealth, or to satisfy our desires. This is the foundation of life for anyone who seeks to attain the crown of Torah and serve G-d. These are words of wisdom.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin kept an interesting letter that the Bach had sent to the Taz, his son-in-law, a letter that he read to his disciples: “G-d has given me the merit of being able to order a new garment for Yom Tom. However I am lacking a certain amount of money to complete it. I therefore need my four gold coins that are in your possession. I ask that you send them to me, but that you subtract six small coins so that your wife, my daughter, can buy some nuts and rejoice during the holiday.”

Each time that Rabbi Chaim read this leader, he would weep and say: “From here we learn that these gaonim studied Torah amid poverty and want, and yet they were content with little and satisfied with their lot.”

Those Who Study Torah

An avrech who lived with very little money went to see Rav Shach a few years ago, sharing his new plan on working at night in order to earn more money. He would continue to study during the day, but at night he would devote himself to another activity that would earn him a respectable salary.

Although the Rosh Yeshiva advised against this, the avrech was stubborn and began to implement his plan. A few months later, he returned to the Rav to inform him of his current situation: “My income has certainly increased, that’s true, but when I look at my monthly budget, the results are surprising. When I devoted myself to Torah during the entire day, a little money remained at the end of the month. Today, although I work and earn a good living, I have nothing left at the end of the month!” The Rav replied, “It’s very simple: Heaven acts in a special way with an avrech who devotes himself entirely to Torah. G-d has promised to guarantee the sustenance of those who study Torah, for He has numerous ways of blessing the small salary that an avrech earns at the kollel. Because you wanted to change your current lifestyle by working, Heaven’s attitude toward you has also changed. You are now considered to be a worker who makes an effort to feed his family. Obviously, in order to meet the needs of your family with the job you have, a few hours of work a night are not enough. You have to exert a much greater effort to acquire the same things!” The Rosh Yeshiva often explained how G-d acts with those who study Torah, namely that He spreads blessing and success on the salary provided by the kollel. This blessing also prevents a washing machine from breaking down, as well as everything else in the home. It also protects family members from illness so as to spare the avrech unnecessary expenses.

Two Things

Rabbi Shimon Cohen, the son of Rabbi Yehia Cohen, was a good friend of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto. He recounted to our teacher Rabbi David Pinto Shlita the story of how he once traveled with his father to a distant village in Morocco, which could only be reached by driving through the desert. They were going to see an Arab who owed them some money.

In the middle of their journey, at the darkest point of the night, their car broke down. Hence they both found themselves in a remote desert, dark and dangerous, without a telephone, electricity, or help. They feared for their lives, dreading thieves, foxes, wolves, and the scorpions that dwelled in the desert. When Rabbi Yehia realized the gravity of the situation, he began to pray for the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto to protect them from all harm.

At that point a miracle occurred. While they were still praying by their stalled car, they saw a motorcyclist at a distance who was carrying all the tools needed for repairing a car.

The motorcyclist approached them and asked Rabbi Yechiya Cohen: “What are you doing in the desert in the middle of the night?” Rabbi Yehia pointed to his car, which was stalled in the desert and unable to move.

The motorcyclist took out his tools, worked on a few parts of the engine, and then said to Rabbi Yehia: “Get back in the car and try starting it.” No sooner said than done – the car started! He then got out of the car to thank the man for having saved them...but they couldn’t find him! He just vanished!

They had merited two things:

First, their prayers had been answered and had an immediate effect. But more than that, they had seen an angel! In fact who else could that man have been, if not an angel sent from Heaven to save them by the merit of the tzaddik? The desert stretched out for hundreds of miles in every direction, with no village or house to be found, so where else could this motorcyclist and his tools have come from?

When our teacher Shlita heard this incredible story, he told his student Rabbi Shimon Cohen: “You have great merit, Shimon, for having seen an angel of Hashem. Since you benefited from such a miracle, never lose sight of the fact that there is a Creator, and be scrupulous in the performance of each mitzvah, the lightest just like the most important.”

Guard Your Tongue

Eliminating 3,000 Accusers

By reducing the number of forbidden words we speak each day by 10, we will avoid speaking more than 3,000 forbidden words in a year. Now just as every word that we learn while studying Torah constitutes an individual mitzvah, likewise every forbidden word that we speak constitutes an individual sin. However each sin leads to the creation of an accusing angel. Thus by fighting our evil inclination and not speaking 3,000 forbidden words a year, we eliminate 3,000 accusers and create 3,000 defenders in their place, as it is written: “If one sits and commits no transgression, he is rewarded as though he has fulfilled a mitzvah” (Kiddushin 39b).