

פרשת מטות

One Halachic section and two historical ones – that would be an acceptable summary of this week's Parshas Mattos.

The Halachic section is that with which the Parsha begins – the laws of *Nedarim* and *Sh'vuos* – vows and oaths.

The first of the two historical sections deals with the war against Midian and the second of those sections deals with the request of the *Shevatim* of Reuven and Gad to remain on עבר הירדן, the eastern side of the Jordan River in the Gil'ad area and inhabit the lands of *Sichon* and *Og* who were roundly defeated as we learned at the conclusion of Parshas Chukkas.

On the face of it, it would appear that each of these three subjects are disparate, unrelated one to the other. And there is more, as well.

The two historical subjects are understandably placed in our Parsha as we are now in the fortieth year in the *midbar* and their appearance at this juncture is in real-time. That is, we are told about them when they occur.

On the other hand, *Parshas Nedarim*, the opening of our Parsha that deals with the laws of vows doesn't necessarily seem to belong here. Why did the Torah place this Mitzvah at the end of Sefer B'midbar when, seemingly, this is not its place? If Parshas Mattos was a compilation of *Mitzvos* such as we find in Parshos Mishpotim, Kedoshim or Ki Setze, we would not ask why a Mitzvah is placed there. The Torah designated those sections as hosts for many Divine commandments. But, Parshas Mattos does not seem to be such a section whatsoever¹.

But, an analysis of the underlying themes of these subjects that seem unrelated may reveal a theme with which the Torah presents us as we come to the close of the era of the *Midbar*.²

¹ Later our Parsha does instruct us regarding the Mitzvos of *Hagolas Keilim* and *Tevilas Keilim*, koshering and immersing vessels, respectively. However, those Mitzvos are connected to the spoils of the war with Midian and thus belong in our Parsha.

² A different analysis would wish to understand the continuity between Parshas Pinchos' conclusion and Parshas Mattos' beginning.

If we begin with the opening section of Parshas Mattos, the section that deals with vows, undoubtedly the principle espoused by the first verse of the laws of vows and oaths forms the byword for that section.

We read (B'midbar Perek 30/Posuk 3):

אִישׁ כִּי יִדַּר נֶדָר לֵה' אוֹ הַשְּׁבַע שְׁבַע לְאַסֹּר אֶסֶר עַל נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ כִּכְל הַיָּצֵא
מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה:

When a man makes a vow to Hashem or takes an oath to forbid something upon himself, he shall not profane his word; according to all that comes out of his mouth he shall do.

If I would translate this Posuk into a philosophical or value-laden idea I would say that it comes to teach me to have integrity. Integrity means that I stand by my word; I imbue my word with value and truth and I mean what I say.

Now the idea of integrity of one's word and commitment to it is not a new idea whatsoever.

We learned in Parshas Kedoshim (Vayikro Perek 19/Posuk 36):

מֵאֲזֵנִי צְדָקָה אֲבִי צְדָקָה אִפְתַּ צְדָקָה וְהִין צְדָקָה יְהִיֶה לְכֶם אָנִי ה' אֶ... לְקִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי
אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

Such an analysis would find an explicit connection as we learn the penultimate verse of Parshas Pinchos (B'midbar Perek 29/Posuk 39). The final half of Parshas Pinchos, with its many verses that precede the one that follows, teach us of the obligatory offerings for weekdays, Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and Yomim Tovim. After those lessons, that verse reads:

אֵלֶּה תַעֲשׂוּ לֵה' בְּמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם לְבַד מִנְדְרֵיכֶם וְנִדְבַתֵיכֶם לְעֹלֹתֵיכֶם וּלְמִנְחֹתֵיכֶם וּלְנִסְכֵיכֶם וּלְשִׁלְמֵיכֶם:
These are what you are to do for Hashem on your holidays; these are besides your *neder*-vow offerings and your *nedava*-vow offerings for your burnt-offerings and your *mincha*-grain offerings and your wine-libation offerings and your *Shlomim*-offerings.

That is, in addition to all of the obligatory offerings mentioned in Parshas Pinchos, there are voluntary offerings that people bring.

Those voluntary offerings are designated as 'holy' by the vow that person willfully makes to bring an animal as a *Korban* and to designate a specific animal as a *Korban*.

Righteous balances and righteous stone-weights and righteous dry-volume measures and righteous liquid measures should be for you; I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out from the Land of Egypt.

We learn in Masseches Bava Metzia (49 a):

...רבי יוחנן אמר: [דברים] יש בהם משום מחוסרי אמנה... רבי יוסי ברבי יהודה אומר: מה תלמוד לומר הין צדק? והלא הין בכלל איפה היה? אלא לומר לך: שיהא הן שלך צדק, ולא שלך צדק! - אמר אביי: ההוא שלא ידבר אחד בפה ואחד בלב.

Rabi Yochanan said, 'One's word [if broken] is a sign of a lack of faithfulness. Rabi Yose ben Rabi Yehuda says, 'What does the Torah teach by writing *hin zekek* – righteous liquid-volume measures? Isn't that included in *EIFOH ZEDEK*-righteous dry-volume measures (because volume measures are the same for dry and liquid materials)? Rather this verse comes to say to you that your *hin*-‘yes’ should be one that is righteous and your ‘no’- should be righteous.

Abaye said, This teaches us that one should not say something that he does not mean in his heart³.

³ See Parshas Sh'lach and the praise that is given Calev who withstood the pressure of the other spies.

The Torah writes there:

וְעַבְדִּי כָלֵב עֵקֵב הִיְתָה רוּחַ אַחֲרֵת עִמּוֹ וַיִּמְלֵא אַחֲרָיו וַהֲבִיאתִיו אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר בָּא שָׁמָּה וְזָרְעוּ יוֹרְשָׁנָה:
And for my servant Calev – since there was a different spirit with him and he followed Me completely – I Hashem will bring him to the land that he came to there and his seed will inherit it.

Rashi writes:

רוח אחרת - שתי רוחות אחת בפה ואחת בלב, למרגלים אמר, אני עמכם בעצה, ובלבו היה לומר האמת ועל ידי כן היה בו כח להשתיקם, כמו שנאמר (לעיל יג/ל) ויהס כלב, שהיו סבורים שיאמר כמותם, זהו שנאמר בספר (יהושע יד/ז) ואשיב אותו דבר כאשר עם לבבי, ולא כאשר עם פי:
A different spirit – He had two ‘spirits’ – one in his mouth and one in his heart. To the spies Calev said, ‘I am with you in your counsel.’ In his heart he would say the truth. Thereby he had the power to silence the other spies, as it says, ‘Calev quieted them’. They thought he was going to say like they said. This is in consonance with what it is written in Sefer Yehoshua, ‘I responded to him as was in my heart’, not like what was in my mouth.

See Rashi to Sefer Yehoshua there.

We read in Parshas Vayeshev (B'reishis Perek 37/Posuk 4):

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי אֶתּוֹ אָהַב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלָם:

Yosef's brothers saw that their father loved him more than all of his brothers and they hated him; they were not able to speak to him peacefully.

Rashi writes there:

ולא יכלו דברו לשלום - מתוך גנותם למדנו שבחם, שלא דברו אחת בפה ואחת בלב:

They were unable to speak with him peacefully – From their bad attributes we learn their praise – they did not say something that they did not mean in their heart.

And even that source is not the first. We learn in Masseches Shabbos (55 a):

אמר רבי חנינא: חותמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא אמת.

Rabi Chanina said, 'The seal of Hashem is *emes*-truth.'

That is, the letters that seal and finish the first three words of the Torah:

בראשית ברא א...ל'קים

form the word *Emes*.

A seal is that which the King uses to affirm his acquiescence and validation of that which is written in the document. The very opening words of the Torah testify to the Torah's integrity.

And thus, the Jew is to imitate Divine integrity by expressing himself honestly and taking responsibility for his commitments. His *word* is to be meaningful.

And thus, even though the Torah provides a mechanism by which to retract a *neder*, one is forbidden to deliberately plan on using that mechanism.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Nedarim (Perek 4/Halachah 4):

ומנין...שאסור לו לאדם להיות נודר בהן על מנת לבטלן, תלמוד לומר לא יחל דברו לא יעשה דבריו חולין.

See the commentaries for explanations of this praise given to Calev for his seeming dishonesty, praise that seem to contradict the value of truth and integrity.

From where do we know that it is forbidden for one to make a *neder* with the intention of voiding it? That is what the verse teaches: Do not profane your words – do not make your word void of sanctity.

It is not difficult to find the connection between this integral theme of the Halachic section of our Parsha dealing with *nedarim* and the final historical aspect of our Parsha dealing with the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River, in *Gil'ad*. When we find that connection we can understand why *Parshas Nedarim* was placed in Parshas Mattos.

In response to that request we read the words of Moshe Rabbenu (B'midbar Perek 32/P'sukim 6-9):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְבְנֵי גָד וְלְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן הָאֲחֵיכֶם יְבֹאוּ לְמִלְחָמָה וְאַתֶּם תִּשְׁבּוּ פֹה: וְלָמָּה תִּנְיָאוּן אֶת לֵב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעֲבֹר אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָהֶם ה': כֹּה עָשׂוּ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם בְּשַׁלְּחֵי אֹתְכֶם מִקְדֹּשׁ בְּרַנֶּע לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָאָרֶץ: וַיַּעֲלוּ עַד נַחַל אֲשַׁכּוֹל וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וַיִּנְיָאוּ אֶת לֵב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִבְלֹתִי בָא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָהֶם ה':

Moshe said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuven, 'Shall your brothers come to war and you will dwell here? Why should you deter the heart of B'nei Yisroel from passing over to the Land that Hashem gave to them? This is what your fathers did when I sent them from *Kadesh Barnea* to see the Land. They ascended until *Nachal Eshkol* and they saw the Land and they deterred the heart of B'nei Yisroel from coming to the Land that Hashem gave to them.

Now, it certainly seems that not only are these words of Moshe Rabbenu to Reuven and Gad harsh, they are without basis.

How could we compare the request of these tribes to remain and inherit in *Eiver HaYarden* with the דיבת הארץ – the slander that the ten spies spoke with determination that their words would be a powerful discouragement against entering Eretz Yisroel?

Reuven and Gad spoke about *their* interests – there is no apparent slander in their words. What did they do so wrong that made them deserving such a condemning comparison?

Perhaps the answer is intimated in another part of the exchange between the tribes and Moshe Rabbenu, as explained by Rashi.

Their initial statement (ibid. Posuk 4) reads:

הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הִכָּה ה' לִפְנֵי עֵדֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶרֶץ מִקְנֶה הוּא וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ מִקְנֶה:

The land that Hashem smote before the Congregation of Israel is a land for cattle and your servants have cattle.

In the second part of the dialogue with Moshe Rabbenu they said (ibid. Posuk 16):

וַיִּגְשׁוּ אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ גְדֵרֹת צֹאן נִבְנֶה לְמִקְנֵנוּ פֹה וְעָרִים לְטַפְנוּ:

They approached Moshe and they said, 'We will build sheep pens for our cattle here and cities for our children.'

Moshe's response appears, on the surface at least, to agree to that part of their proposal. He says to them (ibid. Posuk 24):

בְּנוּ לָכֶם עָרִים לְטַפְכֶם וּגְדֵרֹת לְצֹאֲנֵכֶם וְהֵיכָא מִפִּיכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ:

Build for yourselves cities for your children and pens for your sheep – that which comes out of your mouth, you shall do.

However, if we had read an earlier Rashi we would have been more closely attuned to the nuances of the words of Moshe Rabbenu and we would have understood that what appeared to be agreement in full was one that was only partial because Moshe had reservations regarding the pledge of the tribes of Reuven and Gad.

Rashi writes above (Posuk 16):

נבנה למקננו פה - חסים היו על ממונם יותר מבניהם ובנותיהם, שהקדימו מקניהם לטפם. אמר להם משה לא כן עשו, העיקר עיקר והטפל טפל, בנו לכם תחלה ערים לטפכם ואחר כך גדרות לצאנכם:

We will build for our cattle here – They were more concerned regarding their money than for their sons and daughters. They placed their [concern] for their cattle prior to their [concern] for their children.

Moshe said to them, 'That is not what you should do – [This is what you should do-] make that which is important, important and that which is

secondary, secondary. First build for yourselves cities for your children and then pens for your sheep.

These words of Moshe Rabbenu are understood and when we revisit the Posuk with Moshe's response, it is clear that is what he said and that was his intention.

However, there is a second part to his response that demands our attention as well. Moshe said:

וְהֵיטָא מִפִּיכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ:

That which comes out of your mouth, you shall do.

Of course, this statement reverberates within us. It reminds us of the Halachic portion with which our Parshas Mattos begins. It reminds us of what the section of *Nedarim* teaches us from its outset:

לֹא יַחֲלֵ דְבָרוֹ כְּכֹל הַיֵּצֵא מִפִּיו יַעֲשֶׂה:

He shall not profane his word; according to all that comes out of his mouth he shall do.

Undoubtedly, Moshe Rabbenu was disturbed by the request of these two tribes and he was forced to reiterate that which the Torah had already stated and commanded.

This is because we have now uncovered two potential faults with the words of these tribes. The first fault was an interest in staying put where they were in *Eiver HaYarden* without being concerned of being part of the enterprise that was to involve all of the tribes – conquering and inheriting Eretz Yisroel.

The second fault is indicated by their incorrect priorities. Their concern for their material possessions, their cattle and sheep, took precedence over their concern for those who should have been their priority- their children!

And, do not think that these two faults are distinct and unrelated. Once a person's priorities are mixed-up and confused they are most liable to rationalize and to change what they have said. They might have spoken to appease the listener, but inside they thought differently and were likely to adjust their actions to their thoughts in contrast to being dedicated to the fulfillment of their words.

אחד בפה ואחד בלב

They said words that they did not mean.

Let us now revisit the *Meraglim* and see why Moshe Rabbenu did ascribe the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad to be comparable in some way to the spies.

The *meraglim* said (B'midbar Perek 13/P'sukim 28-29, 31-33):

אָפֶס כִּי עַז הָעָם הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ וְהָעָרִים בְּצִרּוֹת גְּדֹלוֹת מְאֹד וְגַם יְלָדֵי הָעֵנֶק הָאֵינּוּ שָׁם:
עִמְלֵק יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב וְהַחִתִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהָאֱמֹרִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּהָר וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב עַל הַיָּם וְעַל
יַד הַיַּרְדֵּן:

וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר עָלוּ עִמּוֹ אָמְרוּ לֹא נוֹכֵל לַעֲלוֹת אֶל הָעָם כִּי חֲזַק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ: וַיֵּצִיאוּ דְבַר
הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תָּרוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר עָבְרָנוּ בָּהּ לְתוֹר אֹתָהּ אֶרֶץ
אֲכָלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ הוּא וְכָל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר רָאיֵנוּ בְּתוֹכָהּ אַנְשֵׁי מַדּוֹת: וְשֵׁם רָאיֵנוּ אֶת הַנְּפִילִים
בְּנֵי עֵנֶק מִן הַנְּפִילִים וְנָהִי בְּעֵינֵינוּ כַּחֲגָבִים וְכֵן הָיִינוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם:

But the people who dwell in the land are brazen and the cities are greatly fortified and the children of the giants we saw there. Amalek dwells in the south of the land and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Emorites dwell on the mountains and the Canaanites dwell near the sea and near the Jordan River.

The spies who came up with him [Calev] said, 'We are unable to ascend against the people in the land because they are stronger than Him. They put out slander to B'nei Yisroel about the land that they traveled in it saying 'the land that we passed in it to travel in it is a land that devours its inhabitants and all the people that we saw in it were of very large proportions. We saw there the *nefilim*, children of the giant, from among the *nefilim*; in our eyes we were like grasshoppers and so we were in their eyes.

Rashi writes:

חזק הוא ממנו - כביכול כלפי מעלה אמרו:

Stronger than Him – as it were, they were speaking in reference to the One Above.⁴

⁴ In *L'shon HaKodesh* the word ממנו has two equally possible translations:

1. More than us.
2. More than him.

The connection of the words of the tribes to the words of the spies *vis a vis* deterring the people from warring with the inhabitants of Canaan is quite clear. The spies wished to prevent the entry into Eretz Yisroel by denying the ability of Israel *and* Hashem to be successful in battle. The words of Reuven and Gad, while not being as powerful at all as those of the spies, might have had the same effect.

But that is not the only point of connection. Reuven and Gad had their priorities confused, particularly when it came to their families in relationship to their monetary possessions.

What did the spies say? We read more of their words (ibid. Perek 14/Posuk 3):

וְלָמָּה ה' מְבִיא אֵתֵנוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְנַפְל בְּחָרֵב נָשִׁינוּ וְטַפְנוּ יְהִי לָבַז הַלּוֹא טוֹב לָנוּ
שׁוּב מִצְרָיִם:

Why is G-d bringing us to this land to fall by the sword, our wives and our children will be the spoils of war; isn't it better for us to return to Egypt?

How convenient for the spies! Their families have become an excuse as well to cover up for their own faults. 'We are not just thinking of ourselves. Our concern is for our loved ones.'

And thus, because of this suspected inner dishonesty of the spies and the tribes that followed their slander, consciously or not, Moshe Rabbenu was concerned that the tribes would not keep their word and he had to warn them:

וְהַיֵּצֵא מִפִּיכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ:

That which comes out of your mouth, you shall do.

Rashi teaches us that we cannot just hear the words of the spies as saying, 'they are more powerful than us'. All the rest of their statements make that point. They are surrounded by enemies on all sides – powerful and frightening ones at that. If someone would raise the point that HaKodosh Boruch Hu is there to protect them, they gave the response: 'they are more powerful than He'.

Certainly, if there is an implication that they are more powerful than G-d, then any statement that 'G-d is with us' becomes irrelevant because *kavayachol*, He, too, will not be of help!

But, as is known, sometimes a warning alone is insufficient. The more that one is concerned regarding the insincerity of the other, the more that additional safeguards must be put into place.

And thus, the section of the tribes of Reuven and Gad contain a halachic message as well.

After the tribes promise to be on the front-line of the battle for Eretz Yisroel before returning to *Gil'ad* and to their families, Moshe Rabbenu repeats their pledge. We read (Perek 32/P'sukim 29-30):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם אִם יַעֲבְרוּ בְנֵי גַד וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן אִתְּכֶם אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן כָּל חַלּוּץ לְמַלְחָמָה
לִפְנֵי ה' וְנִכְבְּשָׁה הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵיכֶם וּנְתַתֶּם לָהֶם אֶת אֶרֶץ הַגִּלְעָד לְאַחֲזָהּ: וְאִם לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ
חַלּוּצִים אִתְּכֶם וְנִאחֲזוּ בְּתֹכְכֶם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

Moshe said to them, 'If *B'nei Gad* and *B'nei Reuven* will pass over the Jordan River with you, everyone who is able to swiftly go to war before Hashem, and the land will be conquered before you, then you shall give the Land of Gilad to them as a possession.

If they do not pass over with you, those who are swift, then they will have a possession with you in the Land of Canaan.

Now we know that a principle of Torah interpretation is that one can make inferences. The principle states:

מכלל הן לאו מכלל לאו הן:

From a 'yes' you can infer 'no' and from a 'no' you can infer 'yes'.

An application of that principle is found in the Mechilta (D'Rabi Yishmael Parshata 8):

(שמות כ"ב⁵) כבד את אבירך ואת אמך. אם כבדתן, למען יארכיון ימירך, ואם לאו, למען יקצרון ימירך; שדברי תורה נוטריקון שכן דברי תורה נדרשין, מכלל הן לאו מכלל לאו הן.

⁵ The entire verse reads:

כָּבֵד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכּוּ יְמֵיךָ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ:
Honor your father and your mother in order that your days upon the land that Hashem your G-d gives you will be lengthened.

Honor your father and your mother – If you honor them, then – 'in order for your days to be lengthened'. If not, it will become 'in order that your days will be shortened'. [We can make this interpretation] because the Torah is symbolic – this is how the Torah is interpreted - From a 'yes' you can infer 'no' and from a 'no' you can infer 'yes'.

The application of this principle of

מכלל הן לאו מכלל לאו הן:

From a 'yes' you can infer 'no' and from a 'no' you can infer 'yes'.

would be expected to be in Moshe's restatement of the agreement with B'nei Reuven and B'nei Gad and therefore, seemingly, it would not have required the 'no' – that they will not receive the Land of Gilad. The 'yes' – if they will follow the agreement implies the 'no' if they won't. Why then did Moshe Rabbenu have to state the 'no'?

Chazal learn from this repetition that when there is a conditional agreement, it must meet the specifications of the conditional statement that Moshe Rabbenu iterated.

That is what we read (Yalkut Shimoni Yeshaya 389):

רבי מאיר דאמר כל תנאי שאינו כתנאי בני ראובן ובני גד אינו תנאי

Rabi Meir who said, 'Any conditional agreement that is not like the conditional agreement with B'nei Reuven and B'nei Gad – the condition is invalidated.

How must that condition be stated? Rambam teaches us (Hilchos Ishus Perek 6/Halachos 1-2):

המקדש על תנאי אם נתקיים התנאי מקודשת ואם לא נתקיים אינה מקודשת, בין שהיה התנאי מן האיש בין שהיה מן האשה, וכל תנאי שבעולם בין בקידושין בין בגירושין בין במקח וממכר בין בשאר דיני ממון צריך להיות בתנאי ארבעה דברים.

ואלו הן הארבעה דברים של כל תנאי, שיהיה תנאי כפול, ושיהיה הין שלו קודם ללאו, ושיהיה התנאי קודם למעשה, ושיהיה התנאי דבר שאפשר לקיימו, ואם חסר התנאי אחד מהן הרי התנאי בטל וכאלו אין שם תנאי כלל אלא תהיה זו מקודשת או מגורשת

ויתקיים המקח או המתנה מיד וכאלו לא התנה כלל הואיל וחסר התנאי אחד מן הארבעה.

When a marriage is entered 'on condition', if the condition is fulfilled the marriage is valid; if not, it is invalid, whether the condition was stipulated by the man or by the woman. Each and every 'condition', whether in marriage or divorce or business or any other aspect of monetary matters, must meet four stipulations.

The four stipulations are:

1. The condition must be stated twice, once referring to the outcome if the condition is fulfilled and once referring to the outcome if the condition is not fulfilled.
2. The statement referring to the outcome if the condition is fulfilled must precede the statement referring to the outcome if it is not fulfilled.
3. The 'condition' must be stated prior to the stating of the event upon which the condition refers.
4. The 'condition' must be one that is possible to fulfil.

If one of these stipulations is missing, the entire 'condition' is invalidated and it as if the agreement was entered into without any condition and then the marriage is valid or the divorce is valid or the purchase or gift are valid because it is then as if there was no 'condition' imposed whatsoever if even one of the stipulations is absent.

Now, our discussion does not allow us to analyze the various aspects governing the validation of a 'conditional act'. What is clear is that it is quite likely that most stipulated conditions are not valid according to the Halachah because they do not meet the very strict demands that are outlined here.

What is also clear is that an examination of the 'condition' that Moshe Rabbenu imposed upon the tribes of Reuven and Gad meets these standards because that 'condition' is the source of validating conditions in all areas of Halachah.

Why does the event surrounding the tribes of Reuven and Gad serve as the host for this Halachah? The answer is apparent. These very restrictive laws are to serve to enforce:

וְהֵיכָא מְפִיכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ:

That which comes out of your mouth, you shall do.

The connection between the second and final historical event of our Parsha and the leading section of Parshas Mattos- the request of Reuven and Gad and the section of vows is quite clear.

How does the first historical event of our Parsha, the war against Midian, fit into this rubric that we are constructing?

We will turn to the Shem MiShmuel⁶ to be aided in our pursuit of understanding. The major passage upon which we will base our thoughts is on our Parsha from the year 5675 d.h. *n'kom nikmas*.

In the past we have noted Rashi's commentary as to why the Mitzvah to make war was directed to Midian only and not to Moav. Certainly, it would have been appropriate to punish Moav because they were the instigators and the initiators of Bilam's counsel and the behavior of the Midianite women. Why was Moav not punished?

Rashi answers that question in our Parsha. We read Hashem's words to Moshe (Perek 31/Posuk 2):

נָקֵם נִקְמַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֵת הַמִּדְיָנִים אַחַר תִּאֶסֶף אֶל עַמִּיךָ:

Avenge the revenge of B'nei Yisroel from the Midianites and afterwards you will be gathered to your people.

Rashi writes:

מֵאֵת הַמִּדְיָנִים - וְלֹא מֵאֵת הַמוֹאבִּים שֶׁהַמוֹאבִּים נִכְנְסוּ לְדַבֵּר מַחֲמַת יִרְאָה שֶׁהָיוּ יִרְאִים מֵהֶם, שֶׁהָיוּ שׂוֹלְלִים אוֹתָם.... אֲבָל מִדְיָנִים נִתְעַבְרוּ עַל רִיב לֹא לָהֶם.

From the Midianites – but not from the Moabites. The Moabites entered into this matter because they were afraid of Israel. They were afraid that Israel would [defeat them in war] and take their spoils. But the Midianites entered into a fight that had nothing to do with them.

⁶ Although our explanation will use a most salient point of a *maamar* of Shem MiShmuel and one that is very basic to his commentary, by no means are we dealing with it in any way that expresses all, or even most, of its content.

Although he doesn't say this explicitly, I think that we can view the Shem MiShmuel as coming to expand upon Rashi's explanation, giving it depth and breadth.

He explains another passage from Rashi who notes with surprise regarding the need that Moav and Midian had to come to an agreement to jointly combat Israel.

Rashi writes in Parshas Bolok (B'midbar Perek 22/Posuk 4):

והלא מעולם היו שונאים זה את זה...אלא מיראתן של ישראל עשו שלום ביניהם.

Is it not that Moav and Midian always hated each other? But because of their fear of Israel they made peace between themselves.

Shem Mi'Shmuel writes:

והלשון מעולם שונאים זה את זה משמע שלא מחמת שום סיבה נתהוה שנאה ביניהם, אלא שכך הוא מעולם מחמת שטבעיהם משונים זה מזה.

The implication of 'they always hated each other' seems to say that there was not a specific reason for their hatred but rather because their natures were different from another.

How do we know their nature? We continue to read:

ונראה דהנה במכילתא (פרשת יתרו) שמואב לא רצו לקבל את התורה משום דכתיב בה לא תנאף וכל עצמן באו מניאוף...ובודאי הפירוש שהם בחנו את טבעם שנמשך אחר הניאוף והתאוה:

The answer appears to be from what we learn in the Mechilta to Parshas Yisro that when Moav was offered the Torah they refused it because it says, 'Do not commit adultery' and *Moav* stemmed from the illicit relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter.

And thus, certainly, the explanation is that Moav investigated their own nature and that it was drawn to promiscuity and desire.

That is, Moav was a nation over which emotions and desires ruled.⁷

⁷ We read in Parshas Vayera (B'reishis Perek 19/Posuk 37):

וַתֵּלֶד הַבְּכִירָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מוֹאָב הוּא אָבִי מוֹאָב עַד הַיּוֹם:

The first-born daughter gave birth and she called his name *Moav*; he is the father of Moav until this day.

What is the nature of *Midian*? Shem MiShmuel continues:

אך מדין נראה שטבעם נמשך לריב ומדון קנאה ושנאה מהוראת שמם מדין ששרשו
מדנים...הרי ששם העצם שלהם נגזר מלשון מדון, וידוע דהשם הוא המהות,

But, by Midian it appears that their nature was pulled toward fighting and dispute, jealousy and hatred. This comes from the meaning of the name of Midian which has its root in *Madonim* – dispute and fighting. The substance of their name is derived from *madon* –fighting⁸. It is well-known that the name is the substance of the object.

Thus, there is a clear difference between the nature of Moav and the nature of Midian. If Moav had not perceived Israel as being a threat, Moav would not have sought to do harm to Israel.

Rashi writes:

מואב - זו שלא היתה צנועה פירשה שמאביה הוא

Moav This daughter was immodest and she said explicitly that this child was from her father.

That is מואב is equivalent to מאב – from the father. Thus, desire was a part of the very nature of Moav.

⁸ In particular, Shlomo HaMelech in Sefer Mishlei makes regular use of this term. See for example Perek 17/Posuk 14):

פּוֹטֵר מִיַּם רֵאשִׁית מְדוֹן וְלִפְנֵי הַתְּגַלְע הַרִיב נְטוּשׁ:

One who opens the water is the beginning of dispute; before the fight is revealed, abandon.

Rashi writes:

פּוֹטֵר מִיַּם רֵאשִׁית מְדוֹן - הַמְתַּחֵל בְּמַרְיבָה הוּא כְּפֹתַח חוֹר בְּגִדְרֵי אִגְפֵי אִמַּת הַמַּיִם וְהַמַּיִם יוֹצְאִין
בו, וְהַחוֹר הוֹלֵךְ וּמְרַחֵב כֵּן הַמְדוֹן הוֹלֵךְ וְגַדֵּל תְּמִיד:

One who opens the water is the beginning of dispute – One who instigates a fight is like a person who opens the closure in a water way and the water goes out and the hole continues to widen. Such is a dispute – it continually expands.

וְלִפְנֵי הַתְּגַלְע - קוֹדֵם שֶׁתְּגַלְע חֲרַפְתָּךְ נְטוּשׁ אֶת הַרִיב:

Before it is revealed – Before your shame [for instigating the dispute] is revealed, abandon the fight.

Midian, on the other hand, needed self-fulfillment that could only be attained by being in a fight, by showing anger and taking revenge. If the fight did not come to Midian, and it did not in our situation whatsoever, Midian needed to find a dispute and be involved in an altercation.

Thus, when we compare Midian and Moav, it is clear that Midian is much worse. Moav was motivated by personal weakness; Midian was motivated by a principle – disputes, fights, altercations and war were its motivation and goal.

This does not mean that we place Moav on a pedestal. Quite the contrary. We will learn in Parshas D'vorim (Perek 2/Posuk 9):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי אַל תִּצַר אֶת מוֹאָב וְאַל תִּתְגַּר בָּם מִלְחָמָה כִּי לֹא אֶתֵּן לָךְ מֵאֶרְצוֹ
יְרֵשָׁה כִּי לְבֵנֵי לוֹט נָתַתִּי אֶת עַר יְרֵשָׁה:

Hashem said to me [Moshe], Do not trouble Moav and do not incite a war against them because I Hashem will not give you from their land as an inheritance because I gave 'Or to the children of Lot as an inheritance.

Rashi writes:

ואל תתגר וגו' - לא אסר להם על מואב אלא מלחמה, אבל מיראים היו אותם ונראים להם כשהם מזויינים, לפיכך כתיב (במדבר כב/ג⁹) ויגר מואב מפני העם שהיו שוללים ובוזזים אותם.

Do not incite – Hashem only forbade Israel from inciting a war against Moav, but they were allowed to instill fear in them and to let themselves be seen with armaments. Therefore, it is written, 'Moav was frightened from before B'nei Yisroel'. They were afraid that Israel would take the spoils of war and plunder them.

That is, in relative terms, Midian was inherently evil whereas Moav wasn't inherently evil but their behavior was wicked and therefore Israel was to employ

⁹ The entire verse reads:

וַיִּגַר מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי הָעָם מְאֹד כִּי רַב הוּא וַיִּקַּץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
Moav was very afraid from before B'nei Yisroel because they were many and Moav was stressed from before B'nei Yisroel.

means by which Moav would be wary of Israel and distance themselves as much as possible¹⁰.

¹⁰ There, in Parshas D'vorim (ibid. Posuk 19) Hashem also gives a command relative to Israel's relationship with *Amon* which descended from Lot's second daughter. We read about Lot and his second daughter in Parshas Vayera as above (ibid. Posuk 38):

והצעירה גם היא ילדה בן ותקרא שמו בן עמי הוא אבי בני עמון עד היום:

The younger daughter – also she bore a son and she called his name *Ben Ami* – the son of my people; he is the father of the sons of Amon until this day.

Rashi there contrasts between the names of these two sons of Lot born out of promiscuous acts. He contrasts between the name *Moav* – which means 'from father' – where the older daughter clearly stated the conditions of her pregnancy and birth and *Ben Ami* – 'the son of my people' by which the younger daughter covered up the conditions of her pregnancy and birth.

He writes:

מואב - זו שלא היתה צנועה פירשה שמאביה הוא, אבל צעירה קראתו בלשון נקיה, וקבלה שכן בימי משה, שנאמר בבני עמון (דברים ב' ט) אל תתגר בם כלל, ובמואב לא הזהיר אלא שלא ילחם בם, אבל לצערן התיר לו:

Moav – the daughter who was immodest explicitly said that her son was from her father but the younger daughter called her son a name that was innocent and she received her reward in the time of Moshe as it says about the Ammonites in Parshas D'vorim, 'do not incite against them at all'. But, by *Moav*, the Torah only said not to fight against them – but to cause them pain the Torah allowed.

The Posuk regarding Amon reads:

וְקִרְבַּת מוֹל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן אֶל תִּצְרָם וְאַל תִּתְגַּר בָּם כִּי לֹא אֶתֶן מֵאֶרֶץ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן לָךְ יְרֻשָׁה כִּי לְבְנֵי לוֹט נִתְּתִיהָ יְרֻשָׁה:

You will approach the sons of Amon, do not trouble them and do not incite against them because I Hashem will not give you from the land of the sons of Amon as an inheritance because I have given it to the sons of Lot as an inheritance.

Rashi writes there in Parshas D'vorim (Posuk 9):

אבל בבני עמון נאמר ואל תתגר בם, שום גרוי בשכר צניעות אמם שלא פרסמה על אביה כמו שעשתה הבכירה, שקראה שם בנה, מואב:

But regarding Amon it says, 'do not incite against them' – implying no incitement whatsoever. That is because of the modesty of their mother who

Nonetheless, we can distinguish between Moav and Midian. If Moav had not felt threatened they would not have sought to curse Israel whatsoever. And even when they sought to curse Israel, the goal of the curse was to keep Israel away from harming them.

In contrast, Midian which was not threatened by Israel whatsoever sought the opportunity to make war against Israel and to destroy us completely.

Rashi has already pointed this out in Parshas Bolok by contrasting Bolok's request with that of Bil'am. We read Bolok's request there (B'midbar Perek 22/Posuk 6):

וְעַתָּה לֵכָה נָא אֶרֶה לִּי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי עֲצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי אוּלַי אוּכַל נָכָה בּוֹ וְאֶגְרָשְׁנוּ
מִן הָאָרֶץ כִּי יִדְעֵתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר תְּבַרֵךְ מִבְּרַךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאֵר יוֹאֵר:

Now, curse this People for me please because it is stronger than me; perhaps I will be able to smite it and banish it from the land because I know that whom you, Bil'am, will bless will be blessed and whom you curse will be cursed.

Bil'am spoke of his goal in cursing in Israel before HaKodosh Boruch Hu (Posuk 11) as he gave Bolok's directive his own paraphrasing. He said:

הִנֵּה הָעָם הַיֵּצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּכַס אֶת עֵין הָאָרֶץ עַתָּה לֵכָה קְבֵה לִּי אֶתֹו אוּלַי אוּכַל לְהִלָּחֵם
בּוֹ וְגִרְשְׁתִּיו:

'Behold, this people that is going out of Egypt and covered the eye of the land, go now and curse it for me perhaps I will be able to fight against it and banish it.

Bolok said to banish Israel from his land. Bil'am spoke of banishing without any particular focus. Is the difference significant? Rashi says that it is. He writes on this latter verse:

וגרשתיו - מן העולם. ובלק לא אמר אלא ואגרשנו מן הארץ, איני מבקש אלא להסיעם מעלי, ובלעם היה שונאם יותר מבלק:

did not publicize regarding her relations with her father as did the older sister who called her son *Moav*.

And I will banish – I will drive them out of the entire world. Bolok only said, 'I will banish them from the land' – I only am seeking to move them away from me. Bil'am hated them more than Bolok.

Of course, we would not wish to rely upon either Moav or Midian in any situation. But, the difference is clear.

The lack of Moav's reliability is a national weakness, inbred in it from its very foundations. It is not that Moav is without integrity; it is that its integrity is fundamentally weakened by its desires and its cravings for excesses.

Midian is devoid of integrity. Those for whom confrontation, dispute and war are a central goal of their existence can never be relied upon. Integrity is beyond them. Whenever their behavior seems to possess integrity it is because that seeming integrity serves to further their ulterior goal of contentiousness¹¹.

If this train of thought, connecting *Parshas Nedarim* with the war against Midian, is correct, then the theme of integrity as espoused by *Parshas Nedarim* together with the inherent lack of integrity on the part of Midian may very well explain a puzzling section regarding that war.

We read the instructions that Hashem gave Moshe gave following the victorious battle against Midian (B'midbar Perek 31/P'sukim 25-31):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: שָׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ מִלְקוֹחַ הַשָּׁבִי בְּאֲדָם וּבִבְהֵמָה אֹתָהּ וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְרָאשֵׁי אֲבוֹת הָעֵדָה: וְחָצִיתָ אֶת הַמִּלְקוֹחַ בֵּין תַּפְשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה הַיִּצְאִים לְצָבָא וּבֵין כָּל הָעֵדָה: וְהִרְמַתְּ מִכֶּסֶּס לֵה' מֵאֵת אֲנָשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה הַיִּצְאִים לְצָבָא אֶחָד נֶפֶשׁ מִחֲמַשׁ הַמַּאוֹת מִן הָאָדָם וּמִן הַבְּקָר וּמִן הַחֲמֹרִים וּמִן הַצֹּאן: מִמִּחְצֵיתָם תִּקְחוּ וְנָתַתָּה לְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן תְּרוּמַת ה': וּמִמִּחְצֵית בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּקַּח אֶחָד אֶחָז מִן הַחֲמֻשִׁים מִן הָאָדָם מִן

¹¹ In his renowned 'Torah U'Madda' lectures in Yeshiva University in the 1980's, my Rebbe Rav Aharon Soloveichik ZT"L quoted his father in regard to those who reject the idea of Torah min HaShamayim and who may, at times, offer explanations that would be valid if they were to stand alone.

Rav Moshe Soloveichik ZT"L, as quoted by my Rebbe referred to those 'valid' explanations as 'deceptive truth'.

Following that line of reasoning, we would refer to these appearances of integrity as 'deceptive integrity'.

הַבְּקָר מִן הַחֲמֹרִים וּמִן הַצֹּאן מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה וְנִתְּתָה אֹתָם לְלוּיִם שְׂמֹרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת מִשְׁכַּן ה': וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה:

Hashem said to Moshe saying: Count the articles of captivity of man and animal, you and Elazar the Kohen and the heads of patriarchal families of the congregation. You shall halve those articles between the participants of the war, those who went to the army, and between the entire congregation. You shall raise a tax for Hashem from the men of the war who go out to the army: one five-hundredth from man and from cattle and from the donkeys and from the sheep. From the half of the soldiers you shall give to Elazar the Kohen, the gift of Hashem.

And from the half of B'nei Yisroel you shall take a portion of one-fiftieth from man and from cattle, from the donkeys and from the sheep and from all of the animals and you shall give them to the Levi'im, the guards of the watch of the Mishkan of Hashem.

Moshe and Elazar the Kohen did as Hashem commanded Moshe.

If I was learning Chumash for the first time and this final Posuk was at the end of the page, I think I would expect to find a new subject when I turned the page to learn what was next. I read that Moshe and Elazar did what they were told – so that would seem to bring closure to this topic.

Except, that expectation is immediately disproved because the Torah continues and writes (P'sukim 32-35):

The taking, the excessive spoils that the people of the army took was sheep [numbering] 675,000. Cattle [numbered] 72,000. Donkeys [numbered] 61,000. People [who were captured], the women who had not had relations with males, all the souls [numbered] 32,000.

Now that the Torah gives me this information I understand the need to have it. We are provided with the scope of those spoils. A vast fortune was taken from Midian. I understand as well the scope of the population who fought against Israel because the women who are numbered here at 32,000 refer to girls under the age of three only¹². If one assumes that the number of males and females are similar, then the

¹² See Rashi to Posuk 17 and Sifsei Chachamim there for greater elucidation.

below-3 year old population of Midian was some 60,000 people and one can begin to estimate the total of their population.

Now, I say to myself, we are ready to begin a new subject.

However, the Torah has not completed its telling of the aftermath of the war. In the next 12 (!) P'sukim (36-47) the Torah performs an elementary school arithmetic exercise and tells us what the resulting numbers of the division of the spoils were based on the formulae it provided explicitly in the earlier verses.

Even before there were calculators the numbers could have been computed. Why would the Torah expend a dozen of its Divine verses to tell me information that I was fully able to obtain on my own – because the Torah provided me with the facts and figures?

I believe that the detailed calculations that the Torah provides us indicates a concern regarding the integrity of those who went to war. Why should there be such a concern?

We read about the army returning from battle and Moshe's scathing criticism of them (ibid. P'sukim 9-18):

וַיָּשָׁבוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת נְשֵׁי מִדְיָן וְאֶת טָפְסָם וְאֶת כָּל בְּהֵמָתָם וְאֶת כָּל מִקְנֵיהֶם וְאֶת כָּל חֵילָם בְּזָזוּ: וְאֶת כָּל עֲרֵיהֶם בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם וְאֶת כָּל טִירְתָּם שָׂרְפוּ בְּאֵשׁ: וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת כָּל הַשְּׁלָל וְאֶת כָּל הַמִּלְקוֹחַ בְּאֲדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֱלֵעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְאֶל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשְּׁבִי וְאֶת הַמִּלְקוֹחַ וְאֶת הַשְּׁלָל אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה אֶל עֵרְבַת מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל יַרְדֵּן יְרֵחוֹ: וַיֵּצְאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאֱלֵעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְכָל נְשֵׂי־אֵי הָעֵדָה לִקְרָאתָם אֶל מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: וַיִּקְצַף מֹשֶׁה עַל פְּקוּדֵי הַתַּיִל שְׂרֵי הָאֲלָפִים וְשְׂרֵי הַמֵּאוֹת הַבָּאִים מִצִּבְא הַמִּלְחָמָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מֹשֶׁה הַחַיִּיתֶם כָּל נַקְבָּה: הֲנָה הָיָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּדָּבָר בְּלַעַם לְמַסֵּר מֵעַל בַּה' עַל דְּבַר פְּעוֹר וַתְּהִי הַמַּגֵּפָה בְּעֵדַת ה': וְעַתָּה הֲרִגוּ כָל זָכָר בְּטָף וְכָל אִשָּׁה יַדְעַת אִישׁ לְמַשְׁכַּב זָכָר הֲרִגוּ: וְכָל הַטָּף בְּנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ מִשְׁכַּב זָכָר הַחַיִּיו לָכֶם:

B'nei Yisroel captured the women of Midian and their children and all of their animals and all of their cattle and all of their wealth did they take the spoils. All of their inhabited cites and all of their castles they burned with fire. They took all the spoils and all of the objects that they took, people and animals. They brought to Moshe and to Elazar the Kohen and to the congregation of B'nei Yisroel the captives and the captured objects and the spoils – to the camp, to *Arvos Moav* that was next to the Jordan River near Jericho.

Moshe and Elazar the Kohen and all of the princes of the congregation went out to meet them, outside of the camp. Moshe was angry at the officers of the army, at the officers of thousands and at the officers of hundreds who were coming from the army of the war.

Moshe said to them, 'These are those who were against B'nei Yisroel in the event of Bil'am to handover a violation against G-d in the matter of P'or and there was a plague against the congregation of Hashem. Now, kill every male of the children and every woman who knew a male for relations, kill. All the female children who did not have relations with a male, let them live for you [as slaves].

If we interpret Moshe's rebuke to the army and translate it into contemporary vernacular, it would read:

You people don't get it! Look at the tragedy that befell us! Look at the moral downfall of our people and the victims of the plague! Look at the cause for the need to go to war and the accompanying dangers!

What was the immediate cause of the moral downfall and the plague and the war – it was these very people¹³ who you are bringing into the holy camp of Israel! Do you want their influence to be re-empowered? Do you wish to bring repeated tragedy upon us all?

I do not understand what you were thinking when you brought them!

Integrity requires good judgment, in addition to sincerity. Without good judgment, the most well-intentioned individual is liable to err greatly. And, for whatever the reason, once integrity falters in one area, it has become defective in all areas.

Moshe Rabbenu told these high-ranking officers of the Israelite army: your integrity has been impugned. It is true that you might have meant no harm – but, nonetheless, the damage has been done.

¹³ Rashi writes:

הן הנה - מגיד שהיו מכירין אותן. זו היא שנכשל פלוני בה:

These are those – this tells us that the people of Israel identified the women and said, 'it was with this woman that that Israelite man sinned'.

Because your integrity has been impugned, it will not be enough to rely upon you for the details of the spoils and to give you the formulas for their divisions.

We must verify the numbers and the division for ourselves and for posterity¹⁴.

¹⁴ This sense of the impugned integrity of the high-ranking army officers of Israel may explain why the Halachos of *koshering* vessels and the Halachos of their immersion in a Mikveh are presented to us within the framework of the war against Midian.

Immediately following Moshe's angry rebuke to the army officers, and before directing the proper division and distribution of the spoils, the Torah presents those Halachos.

In this section (P'sukim 21-23) those Halachos are presented and Chazal interpreted them to apply to the Halachic categories of *Koshering* vessels and *Tevilas Keilim* – the immersion of [even kosher] food utensils that were obtained from a non-Jew.

It is true that our section is a convenient location for these laws – because we are told of the spoils of the war against Midian and thus those who acquired those articles had to be taught regarding the preparations necessary before they could be utilized.

At the same time, the Torah could have easily given us this information in Parshas Sh'mini in Sefer Vayikro or Parshas R'eh in Sefer D'vorim, the two sections where it elaborates on other Halachos of Kashrus.

But, the Divine decision was to teach us these laws in conjunction with the war against Midian and to give these laws a title:

געולי מדין

The repugnancies of Midian.

We are familiar with the term הגעלת כלים, which literally means the removal of the repugnance of dishes, i.e. *koshering*.

But we must ask – why is the name of *Midian* permanently attached to these Halachos, perpetually reminding us of their source?

I think that the answer may very well be that when Moshe Rabbenu understood the lack of understanding of the army officers when they brought the women captives back to *Machaneh Yisroel*, it was clear that the Midianite influence had a repugnant sway over Israel.

The very same theme of integrity with which the Torah begins Parshas Mattos explains the war against Midian and this post-war aspect.

And, thus, when the Torah begins Parshas Mattos and inspires Israel to rise to the occasion matching its speech with Israel's inherent holiness, it commands:

לא יחל דברו

Do not profane your speech; give integrity to your words.

And to provide a stark contrast to what the Torah demands of us, we are presented with the war against Midian who represented the very opposite of this demand for integrity.

However, when faced with the extreme behavior and goals of Midian we may have a tendency to think that they are so radical, that it is irrelevant to us.

Because of this, the Torah brings us face to face with our own reality, that of the Tribes of Reuven and Gad and to demonstrate that even a partial lack of integrity is significant, harmful and dangerous.

And if we examine our Parsha carefully and take note of the fault that Moshe Rabbenu discerned in the request of those two tribes, we will see that the distance between them and Midian is really not so extreme.

Who was Midian?

We read in Parshas Chaye Sarah (B'reishis Perek 25/P'sukim 1-2):

That repugnant sway was indicated when there could be a demonstrable 'absorption' from the Midianites and even when the 'absorption' wasn't demonstrable, the very fact that there was a Midianite presence was repugnant in and of itself.

When the 'absorption' was demonstrable – non-Kosher food was cooked in a pot, the געוּלי מדין, their repugnancies and absorptions, had to be powerfully removed by fire, directly or indirectly.

Even when the 'absorption' was not identifiable, because there was no physical contact with non-Kosher food on this dish, the presence of Midian could still be sensed and that sense of presence had to be eliminated by immersion in the pure waters of a Mikveh.

וַיִּסְרֹף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה וְשִׁמָּה קְטוּרָה: וַתֵּלֶד לּוֹ אֶת זִמְרָן וְאֶת יוֹקְשָׁן וְאֶת מִדְּן וְאֶת
מִדְיָן וְאֶת יִשְׁבָּק וְאֶת שׁוּאֵחַ:

Avraham continued and he took a wife and her name was *Ketura*. She bore for him Zimran and Yokshan and Medan and Midian and Yishbok and Shuach.

Rashi writes:

קטורה - זו הגר...

Ketura – she is Hagar.¹⁵

We read about Hagar earlier in Parshas Vayera (B'reishis Perek 21/P'sukim 15-16):

וַיְכַלּוּ הַמַּיִם מִן הַחֲמֶת וַתִּשְׁלַךְ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד תַּחַת אֶחָד הַשִּׁיחִים: וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּשָּׁב לָהּ מִנְּגַד
הַרְחֵק כַּמֶּטְחָוִי קִשְׁתָּ כִּי אָמְרָה אֶל אֲרָאָה בְּמוֹת הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשָּׁב מִנְּגַד וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת קִלְעָה
וַתִּבְרַךְ:

The water from the pouch was finished and Hagar cast the child under one of the bushes. She went and sat opposite, as distant as one shoots an arrow; she said, 'I should not see the death of the child'; she sat at opposite and raised her voice and wept.

Rashi writes:

ותשב מנגד - כיון שקרב למות הוסיפה להתרחק:

She sat opposite – as his death approached, she distanced herself even more.

Malbim writes:

ותשלך. מענין עזיבה ויאוש

She cast – this means forsaking and despair.

How are we to understand this 'casting away'? Malbim explains this in his interpretation of the following verse that reads:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם... לִיקִים אֶת קוֹל הַנָּעַר וַיִּקְרָא מִלְּאָךְ אָבְרָם... לִיקִים אֶל הַגֵּר מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ
מַה לָּךְ הַגֵּר אֵל תִּירָאִי כִּי שָׁמַע אָבְרָם... לִיקִים אֶל קוֹל הַנָּעַר בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא שָׁם:

¹⁵ See the continuation of Rashi there.

G-d heard the voice of the lad and the angel of G-d called to Hagar from the heavens and said to her, 'What is with you Hagar, do not fear because G-d heard the voice of the lad where he is at.'

G-d heard the 'voice of the lad', but not the voice of Hagar? Why?

Malbim writes:

וישמע. על דרך כי אבי ואמי עזבוני וה' יאספני.

He heard - This is in consonance with the verse in Tehillim (Perek 27/Posuk 10) that reads:

When my father and mother have forsaken me, Hashem will gather me in.

Malbim teaches us that by distancing herself from her presumably dying child, Hagar forsook him. Of course, we can understand her pain. She was not an uncaring mother. She was not callous. But, she forsook him, abandoned him and thus G-d did not attend to *her* cries.

And let us remember Moshe's reprimand to Reuven and Gad – don't place your money before your children.

Is the difference between Reuven and Gad and Midian's source in Hagar qualitative or only quantitative? In principle were they so different or was it just that one was more extreme than the other?

Parshas Mattos teaches us a lesson in personal and national integrity. It teaches us our goal and shows us its opposite and then exposes us to the reality that we may possess some of the very faults for which we rail so strongly against Midian and that Hashem called us to make war against the Midianites.

Yearly, this message of Parshas Mattos is presented to us during the period of **בין המצרים** –The Three Weeks.

We can remember during this time the evil of our enemies, the death and destruction that they wrought and the tragedies that they brought upon us. We correctly remember all of that and roundly curse them for their evil.

At the same time, Parshas Mattos reminds us to correct ourselves, to look in the proverbial mirror and ask us if we demand integrity from ourselves or are content with just blaming our enemies.

Parshas Mattos provides a solution for our national and personal suffering. Let us study it well and internalize its message.

B'vircas Nechemas Tziyon

Shabbat Shalom

Chodesh Tov

Rabbi Pollock