Points to Ponder

Matos-Maasei 5779

**אֶל־רָאשֵׁ֣י הַמַּטּ֔וֹת Matos (30:2)** - Why are the heads of the Shevatim referred to a Matos? When are they Shevatim and when are they Matos? **Rav Aharon Friedman Shlita** (Rosh Yeshiva Kerem B’Yavneh) explained that the term Shevet refers to a young branch of a tree whose strength comes from its source. A Mateh is a branch that is stronger and more established than its Shevet counter-part. A Mateh has the strength to lead. Jewish leaders lead with a self-awareness that they are strong enough to lead -- and to have their words count. Hence, when speaking of the power of speech, the message is given to the heads of the Matos. (It is also why when Moshe didn’t believe in himself, Hashem asked him what was he holding and he answered a “Mateh…”)

**כָּל־דָּבָ֞ר אֲשֶׁר־יָבֹ֣א בָאֵ֗שׁ תַּֽעֲבִ֤ירוּ בָאֵשׁ֙ וְטָהֵ֔ר  That which went through fire shall go through fire and be Tahor** (31:23) - Why are the laws of Hechsher Keilim connected to the battle with Midyan? **Rav Soloveitchik ztl.** noted that in Midyan the Jews got too close to the Midyanities to the point where they were almost indistinguishable. Having distinguishing marks is critical and crucial for our survival and the survival of our Tzelem HaKadosh. **Rav Yaakov Neuberger Shlita** added that the war with Midyan came because Midyan tried to destroy the Jewish family. By wiping away their involvement in our Jewish home, we are attempting the antidote.

**וְהִנֵּ֣ה קַמְתֶּ֗ם תַּ֚חַת אֲבֹ֣תֵיכֶ֔ם תַּרְבּ֖וּת אֲנָשִׁ֣ים חַטָּאִ֑ים  You have arisen…a group of itinerant sinners** (32:14) - Why does Moshe get angry with them? How does he dare refer to them as Tarbut Anashim Chataim, itinerant sinners? **Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski Shlita** noted that it was the fact that they came together B’Irbuviya, like a mob, as their father did with the Miraglim when the young were pushing the old, that demonstrated the lack of respect. Even good ideas are doomed to failure when that happens.

**גִּדְרֹ֥ת צֹ֛אן נִבְנֶ֥ה לְמִקְנֵ֖נוּ פֹּ֑ה וְעָרִ֖ים לְטַפֵּֽנוּ: Pens for our Sheep and cities for our children (32:16)** - Moshe needed to reverse their order of priority because nothing can be more important than the children. **Rav Schachter Shlita** notes that raising the children is really making the means for the extension of one’s own life. Relaying Torah values to them is the best and most important thing we can do.

**וְהִקְרִיתֶ֤ם לָכֶם֙ עָרִ֔ים You shall designate for you cities (35:11**) - The word for designation should be related to Zamen -- what is the intention with the word V’Hikreesem here? **Rav Gifter ztl** explained that the use of the word which sounds more happenstance than prepared teaches us an important lesson. These things are not supposed to happen within the Jewish camp. We cannot accept the loss of life inadvertently as a new way of living -- but it does not mean that we are not prepared for it. By highlighting the Mikreh status while at the same time knowing what to do, we are setting ourselves appropriately to handle tough situations while not accepting them as normal.

**וְלֹא־תַֽחֲנִ֣יפוּ אֶת־הָאָ֗רֶץ And you shall not corrupt the land (35:33)** - After teaching us about the Arei Miklat, the Torah reminds us not to confuse this issue with that of the murderer who cannot be allowed to live. But what does this have to do with corruption of the land? **Rav Bernard Weinberger ztl.** recalled the outrage after a successful transplant of a monkey heart into a human being. He was surprised at the outrage from the public which questioned why a human life was more precious than that of an animal and that the transplant was indeed unethical. He added that in Oregon the sap of certain trees which was being used in cancer treatments was being withheld on the grounds that it was unethical to take from a tree’s life in order to sustain a human’s. Rav Weinberger explained that this is the intent here too -- the Torah is teaching us that when we lack the Torah’s guidance on the definition of ethical, we come to corrupt definitions of what is indeed murder and the land cannot be quieted except by the hand of those spilling the blood -- in the name of preseving nature!

**זֶ֣ה הַדָּבָ֞ר אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּ֣ה This is the word of Hashem commanded to the daughters of Tzlofchad (36:6)** - The Torah’s version of events seems confusing -- were they permitted to marry anyone or only to their own Shevet? The Talmud (Bava Basra 120a) notes that they were indeed allowed to marry anyone they wished -- just that Hashem gave them advice to marry within their Shevet. **Rav Shimon Schwab ztl.** added that while this seems to be the case, when Hashem offers advice, it is perceived by those with Yiras Shomayim to be a command from Hashem. After all, if the purpose of Mitzvos is to do the will of Hashem, taking His advice as to what one “should” do, seems like a command.

Haftara: **וְתֹֽפְשֵׂ֚י הַתּוֹרָה֙ לֹ֣א יְדָע֔וּנִי The educators knew me not (Yirmiyahu 2:8**) - The language used to identify the educators -- Tofsei HaTorah -- needs explanation. What does Tofsei Hatorah have to do with educators? **Dr. Scott Goldberg** notes that teachers who function in a spoils of education approach where the creative process is stifled cause the students to not find Hashem in their studies. Citing **Rav Wolbe ztl**., Dr. Goldberg suggests that ideal learning begins first, where one needs to have the creativity in personalizing their learning and then to make sure that these thoughts are  consistent with our derech by studying and checking with our Rebbeim and Meforshim. That way we all develop a means of Knowing Hashem.