PARSHAS MATTOS

By R’ Efraim Luss

In this week’s Parsha, representatives of Shevet Reuven and Shevet Gad approached Moshe Rabbeinu with a statement followed by a request. The Pasuk (32, 4-5) states: “...and your servants have sheep and cattle.’ And they said, ‘If we find favour in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as an inheritance.’”

In every Sefer Torah we find spaces separating different portions of the text. A small separation is marked in the printed Chumashim by the letter “ב” and a large separation by the letter “ב”. The Torah tells us that Reuven and Gad had many sheep. Representatives of these two Shevatim came to Moshe and told him that the land east of the Jordan River was very fertile, good grazing land. In the following Pasuk, Reuven and Gad request this land for themselves. Between these two Pesukim, the Torah places an interruption – it is marked in the Chumash by the Hebrew letter “ו”. How can we understand this interruption, placed in the middle of their dialogue? According to Rav Chaim Kanievsky קַנְיֶבְשְׁנִי, we can understand this separation by reference to a particular Halachic ruling. Some authorities are of the opinion that Bekurim, “the first fruits”, cannot be brought from produce grown on the eastern side of the Jordan. This is deduced from the Pasuk that describes the Mitzvah of Bekurim (Devarim 26, 10): “The first of the fruits of the land that you have given to me.”

Reuven and Gad wanted to be able to fulfill the mitzvah of Bekurim. They explained to Moshe that they had many sheep and cattle and that the land just east of the Jordan perfectly suited their needs. Then they paused. They were hoping that Moshe Rabbeinu would offer them that land. Had he made this proposal, the portion “MeEver HaYarden”, would have been considered “the land that you have given to me”, for Moshe would have given it to them in the name of Hashem.

We can now understand why the Torah places a space between the two Pesukim. The letter “ו” is there to inform us that at that point the representatives of Shevet Gad and Reuven paused and waited expectantly for Moshe to offer them this land. They waited and waited, but Moshe did not make the offer they wanted to hear. They had no choice but to ask outright that “this land be given to your servants”.

Although Moshe had not given an explicit instruction to kill the Midianite women, he became angry with the officers for allowing them to live. For when it stands to reason that a thing should be done, one must do it even without an explicit command. (Shelah)

THE REST OF THE STORY:

What’s behind the Pasuk?

By R’ Yosef Dovid Rothbart

When Nevuchadnetzar conquered King Tzidkiyah, he made him ruler over five other vassal kings. Tzidkiyah was so highly esteemed in the eyes of Nevuchadnetzar that he was permitted to approach and leave his presence without permission. One day, upon entering, Tzidkiyah found Nevuchadnetzar eating a live rabbit which he had trapped. When Nevuchadnetzar realized that Tzidkiyah had seen this, he made him swear he would not reveal to anyone the act of cruelty he had just witnessed. Tzidkiyah took an oath on the Mizbeach Hazahav inside the Bais HaMikdash that he would not reveal what he had seen.

Sometime later the five vassal kings spoke rebelliously to Tzidkiyah about Nevuchadnetzar. “You should be emperor,” they complained, “not that low individual Nevuchadnetzar, for you are from the seed of David.” Tzidkiyah was swayed by their rebellious talk and praise, and was drawn into sharing with them the base act which he had witnessed Nevuchadnetzar commit. After hearing Tzidkiyah’s account, these kings came to Nevuchadnetzar and related that the Jew whom he held in such high esteem had revealed seeing him devour a live rabbit. Thereupon, Nevuchadnetzar went to Yerushalayim, where the Sages of the Sanhedrin came out to greet him. He then said to them, “It is my wish that you explain your Torah to me.” A Torah scroll was brought and they proceeded to explain it portion by portion. When they came to the portion dealing with vows they began to explain the verse that states, “If a man makes a vow to Hashem, or makes an oath to obligate himself, he must not break his word. He must do all that he expressed verbally.” Nevuchadnetzar then said, “I made Tzidkiyah swear not to reveal something, but he has said that he had the oath annulled. Does the absolution nullify the oath?”

“Yes,” the Sages replied.

“But doesn’t the nullification have to take place in the presence of the one to whom the oath was given?” questioned Nevuchadnetzar.

“Yes,” the Sages replied again.

“How then were you able to nullify the oath of Tzidkiyah in my absence?” he demanded of the Sanhedrin.

The Sages were unable to answer him, whereupon the golden thrones they had been sitting on collapsed beneath them, forcing them to the ground. The Sages were then tied to horses’ tails and dragged from Yerushalayim to Lod. The sons of Tzidkiyah were killed in his presence, and his eyes were taken out. Nevuchadnetzar then imprisoned him, and he remained that way as long as Nevuchadnetzar was alive. Thus ended this tragic episode in the beginning of the period of the Churban.

(based on Meam Loez)
HALACHA
BY R'ELI KOHANANOO
Hilchos K’riyas HaTorah (part 6)

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 142) writes that if the Ba’al Koreh errs and mispronounces a letter, he must go back and repeat the word. If this mistake is only caught after the entire portion is read, the Tzibur must reread that portion. The reason is that if the Ba’al Koreh does not repeat the word, he will not have read the entire portion as it was meant to be read. The Rema (ibid) points out that this only applies if the way the Ba’al Koreh pronounced the word changes its meaning. Where, however, he simply misread the tune (Trup) or vowels, the Tzibur does not have to reread the portion if the mistake is caught later, but they should protest the error if the mistake is caught at the time that it is made. The Mishna Berurah (ibid, 4) elaborates that if a letter is added or subtracted in a manner which doesn’t change the connotation, the portion does not need to be reread. However, if the misplacing of vowels causes the meaning of the word to change, the Ba’al Koreh would have to go back and read it again. The Biur Halacha (s.v. Avel) discusses a situation where an entire word is skipped but the idea isn’t changed. He writes that it is Pashtut that the Tzibur would have to go back. An example of this is if a person reads “Ki Ani Hechbaditi” as “Ki Hechbaditi”: skipping the word “Ani” does not change its meaning in anyway.

However, according to all opinions, one would have to go back. The Biur Halacha (s.v. Machazirin) writes that this Halacha is subject to Machlokes. According to the Meчерber, a person would have to go back in all cases where a mistake occurred even after the reading was completed, and brachos would be recited before and after the reading. The Chaye Odom, however, disagrees and says that although the portion would have to be repeated, with regards to the brachos we rely on the opinions that maintain that a Tzibur does not have to go back, and so brachos would not have to be repeated. In practice, the Biur Halacha maintains that a person should not make a bracha in such a situation, since the Rishonim who say that the Ba’al Koreh must go back may only require him to do so if the mistake is caught during the reading and not later on. This Halacha only applies to the reading on Shabbos, as the Mecherber (O.C. 137) holds that in the case of the weekday and Shabbos Mincha reading, even if an entire Pasuk is skipped, as long as ten pasukim are read, the Ba’al Koreh does not need to go back. However, the Biur Halacha brings a Yerushalmi that seems to suggest that in a case similar to this one, a Tzibur would have to go back, and leaves the Halacha in Tzarich Iyun.

REFLECTIONS

A small community wished to have a Sefer Torah written for its synagogue. The people got together, raised the necessary funds and hired a Sofer to do the writing. After many, many months the job was completed, and the townspeople began to plan a day of celebration for when their Torah would be brought to their synagogue.

As part of the festivities, the Rav of the community was going to drape the Sefer Torah with a beautiful mantel (covering). The women in the town were each asked to make a mantel for the new Sefer Torah. They would all eventually be used on different occasions; however, the nicest one would be used to wrap the Torah on the day that it would be brought through the streets under a Chuppah, accompanied by the entire congregation, to the synagogue.

The women worked feverishly, each trying to weave and sew the most magnificent covering. The day of the celebration finally came and the Rav and the Rosh Hakahal (leader of the community) were asked to choose which of the coverings they deemed the most beautiful. All the coverings were spread across a wide table, and each one was more gorgeous than the next. After examining each one carefully, the Rav and the Rosh Hakahal both agreed that the purple one with the multicolored embroidery that depicted Mount Sinai was the most suitable one.

The elderly woman who had made it was thrilled beyond words. She felt that her arduous work had been worthwhile, for now she would have the honour of having her handiwork bedeck the new Sefer Torah. Her family shared in her pride. The Torah was brought outside to the waiting crowd and the Rosh Hakahal both agreed that the purple one with the multicolored embroidery that depicted Mount Sinai was the most suitable one.

The Rav picked up the beautiful covering made by the elderly woman and began to slip it over the Torah. But it wouldn’t fit! He tried to tug, pull it and yank it, but it was simply too short. The people were surprised but the woman who had made it was agast. How could she have made it so small? Her pride became obvious, the elderly woman ran up to them and cried out, “Wait, I have an idea! You can still use my covering!”

“Wait, I have an idea! You can still use my covering!” asked the Rav.

The above is a parable told over by Rav Shmuel Blech of Lakewood, New Jersey. He explains that surely all of us would agree that this woman’s suggestion was ludicrous. Yet how many of us, in our daily lives, do exactly what that woman proposed to do? We each have a certain life style that we feel is suitable for ourselves. At times, though, what we may perceive as desirable and important is in violation of Torah or Rabbinic law. What we should do is readjust our priorities. However what many try to do, instead, is find a way to bend the law, and perhaps even ‘cut down’ one aspect of the Torah, so that the Torah fits our desires: when actually we should be seeing to it that our lives fit the criteria of the Torah.

The elderly woman ran up to them and cried out, “Wait, I have an idea! You can still use my covering!”

Shabbos table discussions

- Before a person davens, he may not do any work. Is someone allowed to order a taxi knowing that the driver did not yet daven?

- If a person is weak and cannot concentrate during davening without eating anything first, he may daven Brachos and then eat something before going to shul. Is he only allowed to eat the amount he needs to concentrate? What about cake and cookies?
In the previous issue, the tailor went to report to the authorities who the Ger-Tzedek was. The tailor informed the authorities of his discovery, whereupon the Ger-Tzedek was arrested immediately and brought to Vilna for interrogation. The Ger-Tzedek readily admitted that he was, indeed, the missing son of Count Pototzky; and that he became a Jew out of sincere conviction that the Jewish religion was the true faith and way of life.

The church officials knew full well that it would be a disgrace for the church if it became known that the young Count Pototzky had disappeared to become a Jew. They were most eager to cover up the matter. If the young count would express some regret and declare himself a Christian again, they promised that he would avoid any kind of penalty. On the other hand, if he refused to admit that he had made a mistake, he could not avoid the highest punishment for heresy and blasphemy, and that meant being burnt alive at the stake.

The Ger-Tzedek made it quite clear to his inquisitors that neither promises nor threats could make him give up his Jewish faith. He was prepared to die for the Sanctification of Hashem's Name. The churchmen held long religious discussions with him in an effort to weaken his Jewish faith. Again, they were unsuccessful; they were no match for him in Biblical or Talmudic knowledge. There was nothing left to do except subject him to all sorts of torture in an effort to break his spirit. But the saintly Ger-Tzedek never wavered.

Finally, the old Count and Countess Pototzky were informed by the authorities that their long lost son Valentin had turned up as a Jew. They were told that the only way to save him from the penalty of death would be if they could somehow convince him to acknowledge his mistake.

The Pototzky family was, understandably, overwhelmed by the news of their son’s return. Yet they were also filled with a feeling of shame and pain that he had become a Jew!

They hurried to the place where they were to meet their son, and waited for him with anxiety and confused emotions. Presently he was led into the waiting room by two guards, who promptly left the room.

For a moment the old Count and Countess remained stunned. Could that old-looking, emaciated Jew, with the long beard and side-curls, be their beloved son Valentin? But the eyes were surely his, and there was a strange softness in them. They took turns in pleading with him to have mercy on himself, on them, and to come back to them. They promised to forgive him for everything, and let him conduct his life the way he wished, as long as he formally renounced his conversion.

The Ger-Tzedek explained: “The person who stands here before you is not Valentin, your son, but quite a different person, Avrohom ben Avrohom, a Jew, living in a different world; there is no way in which Avrohom ben Avrohom can become Valentin Pototzky again.”

The day on which his public execution was to take place was the second day of Shavuos, in the year 5509 (1749). A terrible fear gripped the Jews of Vilna as the Festival of Shavuos drew near. They feared that the public execution of the saintly Ger-Tzedek would inflame the mob to an outburst of violence against the Jews, as had often happened in similar situations. On the second day of Shavuos they all stayed indoors and prayed to Hashem for mercy, hoping that the merit of the saintly Ger-Tzedek would protect them.

In the centre of the town, facing the Town Hall, preparations were made for the public burning of the Ger-Tzedek Avrohom ben Avrohom, formerly Valentin Pototzky, only son of Count and Countess Pototzky, who had dared to give up his title and wealth in order to become a Jew. Most of the non-Jewish population in Vilna and peasants from surrounding villages gathered to witness the execution. Some of them, eager to have a hand in it, had brought with them pieces of wood to add to the pile that had been heaped together around the stake.

On a specially erected platform were seated church dignitaries and government officials. Presently, the prisoner was led to the stake amid the sound of beating drums and the hissing and howling of the mob. He was tied to the stake, and before the torch was put to the pile of firewood, he was asked for the last time if he would renounce his Jewish faith...

To be continued...

RIDDLE

By R’ Naftali Spiegel

According to one version, Pinchas did not kill Bilaam. Instead he appointed someone else to do it. Who was this person?

Please send your answers to editor@ohrshabbos.com. Please include your name.

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Come join R’ Yosef Dovid Rothbart on Erev Shabbos 30 minutes before Mincha for a new Shiur, entitled Moral & Ethical Dilemmas, as he delves into stimulating moral & ethical issues from a Halachic perspective.

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Lunch n’ Learn
Take a Torah Break! We invite everyone to join our weekly Lunch n’ Learn, given by Rabbi Baruch Lichtenstein at 12:15 every Tuesday in the Kollel, followed by Mincha at 1:00. Lunch is provided during the shiur.
Did you know...

- Because Moshe referred to the Jewish people as sinners, he was punished? Hashem became angry at Moshe. “Were your forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov sinful men?” Hashem demanded. And as a result of his claim against the Jewish people, Moshe’s grandchild became a priest to an idol.
- Even to take a vow about something that is true should be avoided? During the period that King Yannai ruled, 2000 cities were destroyed because the people who lived there would habitually swear that what they were saying was the truth. Although they would fulfill their oaths, the cities were destroyed. If this is the fate for those who swear truthfully, how terrible the punishment must be for those who swear falsely!
- Moshe did not go out to fight Midian even though Hashem told him personally to take revenge against them? Moshe had run away to Midian after leaving Egypt and he had married there. He felt indebted to Midian and did not want to be the one to attack them. “It is certain that Hashem did not intend for me to wage war against Midian personally, but rather that I should send someone else.”

Therefore Moshe sent Pinchas, who had already begun to fight against Midian.
- Hashem gave the Jewish people a sign to know which Midianite woman was supposed to be killed? All the Midianite women passed before the Kohen Gadol. If a woman was supposed to be killed, her face would turn green. Another opinion is that her face would turn a fiery red.

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