

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 26 TAMMUZ 5759 · JULY 10, 1999 · VOL. 6 NO. 39

PARSHA INSIGHTS

ROLLS-ROYCE

"Hashem said to Moshe 'Calculate the total of the captured spoils...'" (31:25)

Given the choice between renting a Rolls Royce for a day and owning one, I think most people would go for the latter.

If you think about it though, on the day when you actually rent the Rolls Royce, what's the difference? You experience the same silky ride as someone who owns a Rolls-Royce. You enjoy the same people gazing through the window to make sure you're not someone they ought to recognize. The smell of the leather, the quiet air of refined luxury...everything is the same. With one small difference...

In life, things make us happy to the degree that we feel we own them. Renting a "Roller" is never going to feel

the same as owning one.

In *Parshat Matot*, the Torah goes to unstinting length to itemize all the spoils of the war against Midian. It describes exactly how they were divided among the *kohanim*, *levi'im*, the warriors and the general population. What is the significance of such exactitude?

Everything in this world has a limit. The spoils captured by *Bnei Yisrael* may have been very large — but as they were physical objects, there was an end to them. This is the lesson the Torah teaches us here: The physical world is finite, limited. It's this much — and no more.

Even when we have that elegant automobile sitting in the drive, it will never bring us the sort of happiness that a spiritual achievement can bring. Because in the back of our mind, we know that tomorrow someone else

could quite easily be driving it. We may have paid a "Rolls-Royce" price for it, but it's not really ours, because it can be taken away from us in a second. It can be stolen. A tree can fall on it. Its owner can die.

Everything in this world is finite; thus the pleasure we can get from this world is finite. It can be taken away from us in a second. However, our spiritual acquisitions can never be taken away from us. They become part of who we are. It is for that reason that we get more joy out of spiritual accomplishments than out of material possessions, because no one can take them away from us. We truly possess them. And thus we are truly happy with them.

Sources:

Rolls-Royce - *Sfat Emet*, *Alter from Kelm*,
Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The phrases "*Bnei Gad*" and "*Bnei Reuven*" appear eight times in connection with taking their inheritance before the other tribes. Thus, the tribe of Gad and Reuven were exiled from that inheritance eight years before the other tribes.

• *Ba'al Haturim*

לע"נ
 ר' נתן בן ר' מאיר ז"ל
 כ"ז תמוז תשנ"ו
 ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

ROSH HASHANA OF THE SPECIAL TREE

Four varieties of Rosh Hashana are listed in the opening *mishna* of this *mesechta*. One, the Rosh Hashana related to the tree, is on the 15th of Shevat according to the opinion of Beit Hillel; it is familiar to us as “Tu (15th) B’Shevat — the New Year of the trees.”

There are several halachic implications of this date, such as determining the year’s beginning in regard to tithes. Fruits reaching a certain state of development before Tu B’Shevat are not tithed with fruits that reach that stage later. Similarly, this date determines the *type* of tithe that applies: *Ma’aser sheni*, the “second tithe” applies to fruits of the second year in the seven-year agricultural cycle; whereas, *ma’aser ani*, the tithe for the poor, applies to fruits of the third year. There is also the ramification of how to determine when the fruits of a tree have passed the three year stage during which they are forbidden as *orlah*. (Whether Tu B’Shevat determines the beginning of the *shemita* year for fruits is the subject of a lively debate of halachic authorities cited by Rabbi Shlomo Strashun (Rashash) in the back of the *gemara*.)

One of the great Chassidic leaders, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech of Dinov, in his classic work “Bnei Yissachar” makes an interesting observation: All the items mentioned in the *mishna* affected

by the various Rosh Hashana dates — kings, documents, festivals, animals and vegetables — appear in the plural form. The only exception is the tree which is referred to in the singular.

This, he suggests, may be a hint that on Tu B’Shevat, the New Year of the trees, we focus on one particular tree, the one which provides the *etrog* for the mitzvah of taking the four species on Succot. There is a tradition, he notes, to pray on that day to have the privilege of acquiring not only a kosher *etrog*, but a beautiful one as well. It is on that day that the sap rises in fruit

trees, and the *etrog* each Jew will acquire depends on his individual merit. Prayer on this day, concludes the author, will “bear fruit,” and it is to this prayer which the *mishna* alludes in switching to the singular form in regard to trees.

• Rosh Hashana 2a

THE HIDDEN KING

Standing before the Persian king whom he served, Nechemia realized that the fate of Jerusalem’s beleaguered Jewish community, desperately trying to rebuild the city following the Babylonian Exile, depended on his gaining royal permission to take temporary leave from his post and assuming leadership of that effort. The presentation of his plea is thus described:

“The king said to me ‘What is your request?’ and I prayed to the Heavenly G-d. I said to the king: ‘If it please the king, and your servant finds favor with you, let me be sent to Judea, to the city where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.’” (*Nechemia 2:45*)

The prayer for heavenly assistance appears, on the surface, to be a parenthetical pause between the king’s question and Nechemia’s response. Maharsha suggests, however, that Nechemia’s recording of what he said to the king is not a reference to his response to the Persian ruler but rather constitutes the text of his prayer to Heaven. The king to whom he addressed these words was the King of Kings whom he implored to grant him favor in the eyes of the earthly king.

The source for such an approach is found in the words of another great Jewish leader of that period between the first and second *Beit Hamikdash*. When Daniel interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, he thus described the heavenly gift of power which had been granted him:

“You, King of Kings, Lord of the heavens, a mighty and powerful kingdom has been granted to you.” (*Daniel 2:36*)

Wherever the word “king” is used in the Book of Daniel, say our Sages (*mesechta Shavuot 35b*), it refers to an earthly ruler except in this passage. Daniel was explaining to the vain-glorious world conqueror that it was the Divine king of Kings, L-rd of the Heavens, Who had granted him his mighty and powerful kingdom and Who had sent him a message in his dream that this kingdom, the first of Jewry’s four exiles, would eventually give way to others until the Kingdom of Heaven was finally established on earth.

• Rosh Hashana 3b



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PARSHA Q&A?

MATOT

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "*machaneh*" (camp). Which *machaneh*?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

MASEI

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *yovel*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

MATOT

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 and 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitzit*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machaneh Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikveh*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for

- their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
 10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

MASEI

1. 33:1 - To show Hashem's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds

of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.

3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil*.
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvos* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

F. V. from Holland asked:

Here's a question that has baffled me for years: Why in *Parshat Matot* is the casualty report given *after* the counting of the spoils? The verse says Moshe counted and apportioned all the spoils captured in the war against Midian (*Bamidbar 31:25-46*); only then did the captains report to Moshe saying "We have taken a head-count of the warriors under our charge, and not one man is missing." (*Bamidbar 31:48-9*) Shouldn't they have counted the soldiers first to see if any died? Aren't people more important than things?

ANSWER:

Dear F.V.,

The captains' report was not a casualty report. Rather, they were saying that they monitored every soldier during the entire battle, and not one was ever missing from surveillance; and hence, no one sinned with any of the Midianite women.

• *Ramban*

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

KOTELKAM

Jennine Wessell from Jefferson, Ohio
<jmrwsl@looksmart.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
From the KotelKam, you see over to the left on top of some buildings six large stars on pedestals. I would love to know what they are, and what they are for?*

Dear Jennine Wessell,

What you're seeing is a large monument to the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust. There are six large tubes with flames inside each tube, and six Stars of David, one star on top of each tube. The five Hebrew letters of the word "yizkor" — "G-d will remember" — are written there, one letter between each tube.

The kotalkam is a 24-hour camera at Jerusalem's Western Wall. It's at <http://www.kotelkam.com>

THANKS!

Name@Withheld wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Last year, on the 6th of Adar, our then almost three year-old son was miraculously saved from being run over by a car (which in order to turn, drove backwards on the pavement, didn't see my son, knocked him down and stopped just as the back-wheels of the car were touching him). The driver, a young man with his mini-van full of friends, admitted that he just stopped his car without knowing why. He didn't*

hear my screams or the screams of a bystander who pulled my scared-to-death child from beneath the car. You won't believe that my son, who was taken in ambulance to the hospital, didn't have a scratch. A true miracle. We hosted a "mesibat hodaya" (thanks-giving celebration). I did some soul searching asking myself, "why did this happened; what did G-d want to get through to me?"

My question is: What would be the proper way to thank Hashem this coming year on the anniversary of this date for the great kindness He bestowed — and always bestows — upon me and my family, especially this time for letting us keep our three year-old. How should we celebrate this special day?

Dear Name@Withheld,

You should celebrate every year by hosting a fancy, festive meal. Invite a lot of people and tell about the miracle. As King David said in Psalms, "In a large group of people I am going to praise You." You should light candles and recite *Tehillim* (Psalms) of thanks at the meal. Give extra charity on this day; perhaps give the numerical value of your son's Hebrew name. (Each Hebrew letter has a different numerical value.)

Which reminds me of a story. Many years ago in Williamsburg, NY, a wealthy man was called upon to say the blessings over the Torah. After this honor, he publicly pledged 47 dollars to charity. "Why 47 dollars?" they asked him. "In honor of our Grand Rabbi, Rabbi Yoel Teitlebaum. The numerical value of his name, 'Yoel,' is 47. Hearing this, the Grand Rabbi called out: "Back in Europe they used to call me 'Yoelish.' " (Yoelish = 357)

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Torah and Nature:

I'd like to subscribe to Ohr Somayach's "Torah and Nature" publication. As a *frum* (Torah observant) molecular biology grad student, I am occasionally asked "Does your research conflict with your belief in G-d?" My response is that my research only strengthens my belief. For me, understanding the intricacies of natural phenomena is one way of developing an appreciation of *niflaos haboray* (wonders of the Creator). I'd also like to thank you for the incredible work you do, especially for Ask the Rabbi. *Kol hakavod* and *yasher kochachem*.

• Aliza S Ricklis <aricklis@juno.com>

Re: Ask the Rabbi:

Love the little humor you inject into your "Ask the Rabbi" answers. That is what makes it so special.

• A Bubbe <Abubbe@aol.com>