

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT CHUKAT • 5 TAMMUZ 5783 JUNE 24 2023 • VOL 30 NO. 27

SHABBAT PARSHAT BALAK • 12 TAMMUZ 5783 JULY 1 2023

PLEASE NOTE OUTSIDE ISRAEL CHUKAT AND BALAK WILL BE READ TOGETHER ON 12 TAMMUZ • JULY 1 2023

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Rabbi of the Year

“...a man who would die in a tent” (19:14)

We saw a lot of *hashgacha pratit* (Divine supervision) when our daughter got married a few weeks ago, but one of the more amazing events was the following. When the uncle of the groom, Julian, opened his invitation to the wedding, he exclaimed, “My rabbi is the groom’s father-in-law!” The fact that I was Julian’s rabbi was news to me. I’d never met him. Julian is a professor of physiology and biophysics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. As Julian explained at the Shabbat Sheva Brachot, he has a fifteen-minute ride from his office to his home. He doesn’t have a lot of time, and so every Elul he chooses one rabbi from Torah Anytime to be his rabbi for the year. And this year, out of more than one thousand Torah Anytime rabbis, he chose me.

The modern media has brought a communication explosion. The virtual classroom means that you can now give a shiur, a lecture, that millions of people can join. Your audience is limitless. But it also has a drawback. Sometimes you feel, “Hello! Is there anyone out there?” When you speak to a live audience, you sense their reaction and it nourishes you. It gives your presentation life. When you make a video, you’re not speaking to flesh and blood, you’re speaking to a piece of glass, a lens that is as responsive as one would expect a piece of glass to be.

Baruch Hashem, I’ve had the merit to be able to make Torah videos for over four years on an almost weekly basis, but there’s no denying that some weeks I’m using more perspiration than inspiration. It gets more and more difficult to keep coming up with something original. There are just so many clips of desert landscapes to depict the Exodus, just so many videos of ancient Egypt. So, it’s really nice when someone steps out from “behind the lens” and gives you the encouragement to carry on.

“...a man who would die in a tent”

When you feel you’re in your own tent and there’s no-one out there, it’s great to know that someone’s listening.

As Rabbi Noach Orlowek once remarked, “Rabbis need encouragement too.”

Thanks, Julian!

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Gittin 37-43

Three Ways To Go Broke

Rabbah said, “On account of these three things, ba’alei batim lose their wealth: they free their Canaanite slaves (thereby transgressing a positive mitzvah – Rashi), they check their properties on Shabbat (to know what needs fixing during the week – Rashi) and they set their meal-times on Shabbat at the time of the Beit Midrash (when the Torah Sage teaches the public on Shabbat, and they should instead have planned their meals to be either earlier or later – Rashi).”

What is the connection between these three negative behaviors and these people losing their wealth?

Freeing his Canaanite slave shows utter disregard for the wealth that Hashem granted him, by discarding at least part of his wealth in a manner that transgresses a commandment of the Torah.

Checking his properties on Shabbat to see what needs to be fixed during the week is a forbidden activity and a forbidden thought. Therefore, when he works during the week on his properties to actualize these forbidden thoughts, his work will be in vain – measure for measure.

Having Shabbat meals at the time for Torah study shows a person’s priorities. One whose highest priority is learning Torah will receive financial blessing from Hashem. One whose priority is eating his meals instead of attending the communal Torah lecture does not merit a Divine financial blessing. (Maharsha)

▪ *Gittin 38b*

Halfway Free

“We (the Beit Din) force his master to make him a free person...”

The *mishna* teaches about how to deal with a case of a Canaanite slave who is “half-free.” For example, he was owned by two partners and one partner freed him while the other one did not. Initially Beit Hillel taught that he could alternate working for himself and for his remaining master, while retaining the status of half-slave/half-free. Beit Shammai, however, questioned the merit of this arrangement, since the person’s current status does not allow him to marry or procreate. Therefore, Beit Shammai avers that the best solution is to force his master to free him, a solution that Beit Hillel concurs with at the conclusion of the *mishna*.

Since the master is transgressing a mitzvah by freeing him completely – “they (your Canaanite slaves) will serve you forever” (Lev. 25:46) – how can we force the master to commit a transgression in order to benefit him by allowing him to marry and procreate? In fact, the Talmud in a number of places states rhetorically, “Can we say to a person ‘Transgress!’ in order to help another person?” The Rishonim seek to understand how the conclusion of our *mishna* does not contradict this other principle, one which is also cited as halacha in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 328:10, Rema.

Tosefot here offers two possible answers. One is that a person may transgress to benefit another if the other person did not act negligently, and needs to be helped from a problematic situation which was not of his doing. Another answer is that for the sake of the fulfillment of a great mitzvah this principle is overridden and we allow a transgression. For a comprehensive treatment of this topic I recommend *Avotot Ahava – Kiruv Rechokim B’Halacha* (4:1), authored by Rabbi Moshe Newman and Rabbi Mordechai Becher and published by Feldheim Publishers.

Gittin 42a-b

PARSHA OVERVIEW - CHUKAT

The laws of the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer, are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. The Jewish People resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him for 30 days. Sichon, the Amorite, attacks Bnei Yisrael when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, Bnei Yisrael conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

PARSHA OVERVIEW - BALAK

Balak, King of Moav, is in morbid fear of the Bnei Yisrael. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, G-d speaks to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilaam is so insistent, G-d appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a malach (emissary from G-d) blocks Bilaam's donkey's path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her. The malach instructs Bilaam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say about the Jewish People. When Bilaam arrives, King Balak makes elaborate preparations, hoping that Bilaam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilaam attempts to curse, and three times blessings are issued instead. Balak, seeing that Bilaam has failed, sends him home in disgrace. The Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping the Moabite idols, and they are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This act brings an end to the plague – but not before 24,000 people died. The laws of the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer, are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into

contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. The Jewish People resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him for 30 days. Sichon, the Amorite, attacks Bnei Yisrael when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, Bnei Yisrael conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

Q & A - CHUKAT

Questions

1. "Take a perfect Para Aduma (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" temima mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a Para Aduma?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the Para Aduma; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the mitzvah of the Para Aduma entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that all of the congregation came to Midbar Tzin?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of Para Aduma?
8. During their journey in the midbar, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the entire congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon rather than pass through Moav to enter Eretz Canaan?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

Answers

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains tahor; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts tumah; c) He and his clothing contract tumah.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were all fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to speak to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the midbar. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - Har Sinai for receiving the Torah, Har Nevo for Moshe's burial, and Hor Hahar for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, which was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, to which everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the Eretz Canaan side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (Devarim 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

Q & A - BALAK

Questions

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. Why did G-d grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
4. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?
5. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
6. G-d asked Bilaam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
8. What is evidence of Bilaam's arrogance?
9. In what way was the malach that opposed Bilaam an angel of mercy?
10. How did Bilaam die?
11. Why did the malach kill Bilaam's donkey?
12. Bilaam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Bilaam told Balak to build seven altars. Why specifically seven?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
16. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
17. What were Bilaam's three main characteristics?
18. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
19. What phrase in Bilaam's self-description can be translated in two opposite ways, both of which come out meaning the same thing?
20. Bilaam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

Answers

1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power.
2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
3. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."
4. 22:6 - Because Bilaam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
5. 22:8 - Only at night.
6. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that G-d isn't all-knowing.
7. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them completely.
8. 22:13 - He implied that G-d wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity.
9. 22:22 - It mercifully tried to stop Bilaam from sinning and destroying himself.
10. 22:23 - He was killed with a sword.
11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilaam." G-d is concerned with human dignity.
12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilaam said, "G-d told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me. The same thing happened to Avraham: G-d told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak but later canceled the command through an angel."
13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avot. Bilaam said to G-d, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them."
14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him.
15. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do mitzvot.
16. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them.
17. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride and greed.
18. 24:2 - He saw each tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
19. 24:3 - "Shatum ha'ayin." It means either "the poked-out eye," implying blindness in one eye; or it means "the open eye", which means vision but implies blindness in the other eye.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Chukat: The Right Site

After Aaron's death in the Jews' last year wandering the wilderness, the Canaanite king of Arad in the south heard that the Jews were traversing the *derech ha'atarim* on their way to the Holy Land, and decided to pre-emptively attack them (Num. 21:1). The meaning of the word *atar* in this context is somewhat obscure, with most sources (like *Eichah Rabbah* 1:21, Targum Onkelos, Menachem Ibn Saruk, Rashi, Rashbam, Rabbeinu Yosef Bechor Shor, Ibn Ezra, and Radak) relating it to the word *la'tur* ("to spy") by seeing the initial ALEPH as extraneous to the core root. They explain that *derech ha'atarim* refers to the route that the Ten Spies had taken close to four decades prior, entering the Holy Land from the south. However, this essay follows another subset of commentators who take the word *atar* in this context to mean "place," "site," "location," or "spot." In that sense, the Hebrew word *atar* appears to be synonymous with the Hebrew word *makom* and the Aramaic word *dughta*, so this essay focuses on attempting to trace the etymologies of those words and search for how they might differ.

We begin our discussion with the very common Hebrew word *makom*, which appears an impressive four-hundred times in the Bible. That word means "place/site/location/spot" in various different ways. What's interesting about the word *makom* is that Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970) in his *Machberet Menachem* has no entry for the word, so we do not know what he understood as its root. However, both Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1050) and Radak (1160-1234) in their respective *Sefer HaShorashim* list the word *makom* as a derivative of the trilateral root KUF-VAV-MEM, thus presuming that the initial MEM is not radical to the core root. Words derived from this root have various meanings, including "standing," "rising up (e.g., against one's enemies)," and "establishing." How these concepts relate to the word *makom* is not readily understood.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) fills in the blanks by offering a comprehensive analysis of words derived from KUF-MEM and how they relate to one another (being the biliteralist that he was, Rabbi Pappenheim did not see the middle VAV as essential to the root from which *makom* derives). He identifies the core meaning of this root as "height," in reference to the dimension of a physical object that measured along the up-down axis. From this core root, derives the word *komah* ("[physical] stature"), *kamah* ("standing grain," i.e., unharvested produce), *kumah* (the act of "standing/arising," which in a figurative way refers to one who holds his own stature while facing adversity), *kiyum* ("everlasting/established," which refers to something maintaining its composure and stature without ever changing), and finally, *makom* ("place," i.e., the geographical location where something has been planted and thus firmly-established, also borrowed in a more abstract sense to refer to any particular "spot").

Rabbi Pappenheim also sees the term *nekamah* ("revenge") as related to this root, because it denotes keeping the "debt" that a wrongdoer is owed as something "well-established," until such late time as one is able to "repay/payback" that debt by vengefully taking retribution. Either way, Rabbi Pappenheim's framework helps us better understand the etymology behind the Hebrew word *makom* and how it relates back to its core root. For an explanation of why Hashem is sometimes called *Ha'Makom* (literally, "the place") in rabbinic literature and liturgy, see *Ha'Ktav Ve'Ha'Kabbalah* to Ex. 33:21.

Going back to the phrase *derech ha'atarim* in which the word *atar* appears, we previously mentioned that some commentators explain that this word means "place," "site," "location," or "spot." To be more precise, exegetes like Rabbi Toviah ben Eliezer in *Pesikta Zutrata/Midrash Lekach Tov* (to Num. 21:1), Rabbeinu Meyuchas (to Num. 21:1), and Rabbi Menachem Ricanati (to Num. 21:1) all use the word *makom* to define the word *atar*. As a matter of fact, in other cases, Rashi himself also uses the word *makom* to define the word *atar* (see Rashi to Dan. 2:38, Ezra 6:3, 6:8, 8:15, *Ketubot* 68a, *Bava Metzia* 67a, *Bava Batra* 29a, 103a, *Avodah Zarah* 7b, 31b).

In context, this would seem to mean that the Canaanite king of Arad heard that the Jews had been taking the “scenic route” to engage in site-seeing, hence the term *derech ha'atarim* would literally mean “the path of the sites/places.” Of course, in Modern Hebrew, the word *atar* has been reappropriated to more closely parallel the English word *site*, so it therefore refers to “tourist sites/attractions,” “construction sites,” and “geo-location,” plus *atar* is also used in reference to “websites.”

**So, are makom and atar actually synonyms? And what about the Aramaic word dughta used many times in the Talmud? These questions and more are discussed in continuation of the article, available exclusively at:
https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/*

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Havdalah Introduction (part 1) – Farewell My Beloved

“If the Jews won’t make Kiddush, the non-Jews will make Havdalah.”
Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin

In the same way that Shabbat begins with Kiddush, so too Shabbat ends with a form of “Kiddush” called Havdalah. Why was it given a different name? As we have discovered together, one of the meanings of the word Kiddush is separation. The word Havdalah also means separation, but it is rooted in a different Hebrew word – *lehavdil*. However, in Lashon HaKodesh there are no synonyms. No two words can mean exactly the same thing. It is true that when very similar meaning words in Lashon HaKodesh are translated, the nuances are often lost. Nevertheless, there are no two words that convey exactly the same meaning. If so, what is the difference between the words Kiddush and Havdalah? One of the subtle differences between them is that the word Kiddush implies voluntary separation whereas Havdalah depicts involuntary separation.

On Friday evening we welcome the beauty of Shabbat into our lives. We are commanded to sanctify and honor the most awesome of days by making Kiddush. By declaring to all that Hashem created the world in seven days and that we belong to Him. As Shabbat draws to a close, we reluctantly acknowledge that we must once again return to the mundane. To our regular weekday existence. And to do so we must take leave of the grandeur and the sanctity of Shabbat. It is not something we want to do. We have no alternative but to do so. Our reluctance to part from the Shabbat Queen is reflected in the word *Havdalah*. The word expresses our wish to stay in a state of Shabbat from one Shabbat to the next. Yet, because this is not a possibility, we bid farewell to our beloved Shabbat, not by reciting Kiddush but by reciting Havdalah instead.

This distinction between voluntary and involuntary separation can help explain an extremely sharp and even caustic comment made by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, some two hundred years ago. He said, “If the Jews will not make Kiddush, the non-Jews will make Havdalah.” This means that the Jewish nation has been put into this world to sanctify themselves and be a “light unto the nations.” We are here to reveal Hashem’s glorious radiance upon the world. If we do not recognize this fact ourselves, if we do not live according to Hashem’s Will, but, rather, allow ourselves to sink into the abyss of assimilation and intermarriage, the non-Jewish nations will “remind” us that we do not belong with them. They will forcibly prove to us that we are different, even if we do not want to be reminded of that fact. The non-Jewish nations will make Havdalah, so to speak.

I once read an article written by a Reform clergyman from Miami. The topic was assimilation. He wrote, “We think that intermarriage leads to assimilation, but it is the other way around. We marry people like ourselves. The average middle-class Jew is as different from the average middle-class Gentile as your average Hutu is different from your average Tutsi. I know Rabbis aren’t supposed to say things like this. We are supposed to fight assimilation, tooth and nail. But, to be honest, I am about as assimilated as you can get. Put me in a lineup of the average middle-class non-Jew, and the only way you could tell us apart is to play a Jackie Mason tape and see who laughs. The truth is our kids don’t intermarry. They marry people just like themselves.”

Perhaps, inadvertently, the author was right. We are supposed to marry people just like ourselves. Jews are supposed to marry Jews. And Jews are supposed to behave like Jews. What could be sadder or more tragic than our having our Jewish identity forced upon us by non-Jews. To have the non-Jewish nations of the world make Havdalah when we could so easily be making Kiddush instead.

To be continued...

PEREK SHIRA

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The Song of the Strong amongst the Creeping Creatures

The Cat says: “*I will pursue my enemies and reach them, and I shall not turn back until I annihilate them!*” (Tehillim 18:38)

The strong amongst the Creeping Creatures say: “Your wife is like a grapevine in the inner chambers of your house; your children are like olive shoots around your table.” (Tehillim 128:3)

“The strong amongst the Creeping Creatures” seems to refer to low-crawling vertebrates, such as lizards and rodents. These have the combined qualities of being highly prolific, yet physically strong, unlike invertebrates, such as worms, ants, and other weak insects. For example, a queen ant might bear 300,000 ants in a single day, but they are all invertebrates, and are therefore weak, short-lived, and individually insignificant.

This song expresses how Hashem sides with the underdog and has compassion upon the wretched, and we thus find that the smaller and more repulsive a being is, the more it proliferates. It refers primarily to the Jewish people in the Egyptian exile, who, the more they were detested, made insignificant, and trod upon, the more they propagated, bearing six babies each time. Grapevines are more fruitful than olive trees, but have flimsy branches and vulnerable fruits, as opposed to olive trees, which are sturdy evergreens with tough fruit. This song describes Hashem’s blessing in terms of the good qualities of both: “Your wife is like a grapevine,” bearing clusters of babies each time; each who are sturdy “like olive shoots.”

In our state of exile, and especially when we are outside our land, our royal status as Hashem’s chosen nation goes unrecognized. We are often disliked and treated as foreign citizens, or even as enemies of the state. This should not discourage us since it has a hidden blessing. The more that anti-Semitism degrades us and makes us seem like vermin, the more we shall increase mightily – and sing their song.

**Based partially on the following sources: Shirah Chadashah, Ya’avetz; Tiferes Vol. 8, pg. 323*

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Chukat: Snake Eyes

The journey had been long. After thirty-eight years, it now appeared as though they were retreating and turning back. The prospect of a long detour drained their spirit and sowed discontent. Now, all of their provisions had been made, but the people complain of their endless days in the wilderness under monotonous and abnormal conditions: *Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? For we have no bread and no water, and our souls are weary of this insubstantial nourishment!*

The nourishment that they had been provided with by miracles had become monotonous. Hashem's grace, which had guided them daily for all these years, had become routine. They wanted to reach their destination and grew impatient.

In response, Hashem *released* the snakes. These snakes were not *especially* sent. They had always existed in the wilderness. However, until this point, Hashem's Providence had kept them away from the people. For all these 'monotonous' years, He had neutralized the venomous fangs of these predators. Now, Hashem removed this restraint and the snakes behaved as snakes would naturally behave in the wilderness – they bit the people. The purpose of the snakebites was for the people to realize and appreciate the special protection they had experienced until now. Now they would see the dangers that Hashem had spared them from, which lie at every step in the wilderness.

Moshe is instructed to fashion a copper snake and affix it to a tall pole. To be cured from the snakebite, the victim would have only to look upon this snake, to imprint on his mind the image of the snake – the symbol of the perils which Hashem spares us from at all times, without our even knowing it. In this way, one will live with the consciousness that every breath of one's life is a new gift of Hashem's goodness and might.

Rav Hirsch concludes his commentary with a timeless message to renew gratitude during moments of discontent:

“A person is capable of reconciling himself to any fate...if only he will regard himself always as one who was saved from danger by Hashem's grace and given back his life as a gift. A person will feel this way if he considers the precipice along whose narrow edge runs the path of all our lives, a precipice which the benevolent Hashem screens from our view lest we become dizzy, and over which He carries us in His power and goodness as on eagle's wings. A person would bless Hashem for dealing kindly with him, if he would only see [the venomous snakes] which lurk on our path unseen, and which only Hashem's almighty Providence renders harmless.”

▪ *Source: Commentary, Bamidbar 21:4-8*

Parsha Permutations 5783/2023 – Which Week Is Which?

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

This time of year, is an interesting one. For five weeks (six *Shabbosos*), already starting right after *Shavuos*, and lasting until the Three Weeks, the Jewish world will not be aligned. No, I am not referring to constellations, but rather to the weekly *parsha*. A simple innocuous question of “What’s this week’s *parsha*?” will elicit a different response depending on where in the world the question is being asked. This is because the *parsha* will not be the same regularly scheduled one in *Chutz La’aretz* as it is in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Truthfully, this type of dichotomy actually happens not so infrequently, as it essentially occurs whenever the last day of a *Yom Tov* falls on *Shabbos*. In *Chutz La’aretz* where *Yom Tov Sheini* is *halachically* mandated, a *Yom Tov Krias HaTorah* is publicly *leined*, yet, in *Eretz Yisrael* (unless by specific *Chutznik minyanim*) the *Krias HaTorah* of the next scheduled *Parsha* is read. This puts *Eretz Yisrael* a *Parsha* ahead until the rest of the world soon ‘catches up’, by an upcoming potential double-*Parsha*, which each would be read separately in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The reason for this current interesting phenomenon is that this year 5783/2023, the second day of *Shavuos*, observed outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, fell out on *Shabbos*. On that *Shabbos/Yom Tov* the communities of the Diaspora *leined* the *Yom Tov* reading of ‘*Asser Te’asser*’ (*Devarim*, *Parshas Re’eh* 14:22), whereas in *Eretz Yisrael*, communities read *Parshas Naso*, the next *parsha* in the cycle, as *Shavuos* had already ended for them.

Parsha Background

The background for this uncanny occurrence is as follows: It is well known that the *Torah* is divided into 54 *parshiyos*, ensuring there are enough *parshiyos* for every *Shabbos* of the yearly cycle, which begins and ends on *Simchas Torah*. Since most (non-leap) years require less than 54 *parshiyos*, we combine certain *parshiyos*. This means that two consecutive *parshiyos* are read on one *Shabbos* as if they are one long *parsha*, to make sure that we complete the *Torah* reading for the year on *Simchas Torah*.

As detailed by the *Abudraham*, there are seven potential occurrences when we read “double *parshiyos*”. These seven are:

Vayakheil/Pekudei, the last two *parshiyos* of *Sefer Shemos*.

Tazria/Metzora, in *Sefer Vayikra*.

Acharei Mos/Kedoshim, in *Sefer Vayikra*.

Behar/Bechukosai, in *Sefer Vayikra*.

Chukas/Balak, in *Sefer Bamidbar*.

Matos/Masei, the last two *parshiyos* of *Sefer Bamidbar*.

Netzavim/Vayeileich, towards the end of *Sefer Devarim*.

However, there are several possible instances in which certain *parshiyos* are combined in *Chutz La’aretz*, yet are read on separate weeks in *Eretz Yisrael*. This is one of them, with those *parshiyos* being *Chukas/Balak*.

Calendrical Conundrum

Although, as mentioned previously, this calendrical conundrum occurs not infrequently, this year’s split seems to contrast greatly with last year’s (5782/2022) when the odd alignment with *Eretz Yisrael* being a week ahead

continued with a divergence of over three months (!) with *Eretz Yisrael* out of sync with the rest of the world, and only realigning by *Matos/Masei* - around *Rosh Chodesh Av*.

On the other hand, this year, the split will be much shorter, ending right before the Three Weeks, with *Chukas* and *Balak* being read separately in *Eretz Yisrael* and together as a double *parsha* in the rest of the world.

However, this gives rise to an important question: Indeed, many have been asking, why last year did we not catch up by *Chukas/Balak* if it fine for us to do so this year? In layman's terms, why did we wait so long for the whole world to be realigned last year and this year we get to take a shortcut? Or, to paraphrase the Haggada, "Mah nishtana hashana hazos"?

Moreover, this causes all sorts of *halachic* issues for travelers to and from Israel during this time period - which *Parsha* should they be reading? If / how can they catch up? Although technically-speaking, since *Kriyas HaTorah* is practically considered a *Chovas HaTzibbur*, a communal obligation, one is not actually mandated to 'catch-up', but rather fulfills his *Kriyas HaTorah* obligation with whichever *Kriyah* is publicly correctly being read, nevertheless, commonly, special *minyanim* are set up expressly for this purpose.

Many *Yeshivos* in Israel with a large concentration of *Chutznikim* (Ohr Somayach included) made a special reading on that Shabbos / second day *Shavuos* featuring the full following *Parsha* (*Beha'alo-secha*) at Mincha, in order to catch them up with rest of Israel. In fact, several *shuls* in *Eretz Yisrael*, such as the renowned Zichron Moshe 'Minyan Factory', as well as the Beis Yisrael *Shteiblach* in Yerushalayim, offer a solution by hosting weekly "catch-up *minyanim*," featuring the Torah reading of each previous week's Israeli *Parsha*, which is the *Chutznik's* current one, until the calendars re-merge. But those flying back to *Chutz La'aretz* would presumably not have such a 'safety-net' to fall back on, unless one happens to be near the landmark Shomrei Shabbos Shul in Boro Park, which this author has heard offers a Shabbos *minyan* including the Israeli *Parsha*.

Minhag Yisrael

Although some cite alternate *minhagim*, nevertheless, it is important to note that nowadays this *Parsha* split is indeed *Minhag Yisrael*, as codified by the *Gr"a* and *Mishnah Berurah*. We should also realize that back then travel to and from *Eretz Yisrael* was far less of an issue, as since undertaking the trip would take several months, missing one *Parsha* would be the least of one's worries. But to properly understand the 'whys' of this fascinating dual dichotomy, one must first gain an understanding of the *Parsha* rules and setup. In fact, this is not a new question, as several early *Acharonim*, including the *Maharit*, Rav Yosef Tirani, citing Rav Yissachar ben Sussan, one of the foremost experts on intercalation of the Jewish calendar and its *minhagim*, in his renowned *sefer Tikkun Yissachar* (written in 1538/5298), addressed this issue almost 500 years ago.

Managing Mnemonics

While it is true that technically *Eretz Yisrael* does not, nor should not, have to take *Chutz La'aretz* into account, to slow down or join *parshiyos* together due to their independent *luachs* (or to be grammatically correct, '*luchos*') and ycles, as *Eretz Yisrael's* is indeed deemed the *ikar kriah*, nevertheless, there is more to the story.

The *Tur*, when codifying the *halacha*, sets four necessary sign-posts in relation to *parshiyos*, time of year, various *Yomim Tovim*. He also offers special codes, mnemonics, as to remember the proper order of *parshiyos* as they relate to. In a regular year, he writes, '*Pikdu U'Pischu*'. This refers to *Parshas Tzav* being *Shabbos Hagadol* directly before *Pesach*, '*Minu V'Atzru*', *Parshas Bamidbar* is directly prior to *Shavuos*, '*Tzumu V'Tzalu*', the fast of *Tisha B'Av* is directly before *Parshas Va'eschanan* (also meaning that *Parshas Devarim* is always *Shabbos Chazon* and *Va'eschanan* always *Shabbos Nachamu*), and '*Kumu V'Tik'u*', that *Parshas Netzavim* is before *Rosh Hashanah*. These

mnemonics, denoting the four specific rules, or more accurately, necessary points of *parsha* alignment (or realignment) during the year, are accepted *lemaaseh* as *halachah pesukah* by all later authorities.

So, now that we have the necessary background, let's get back to our question. Last year, as per the *halacha pesuka*, the world only re-synchronized after three months by *Matos/Masei*, skipping over the potential combo of *Chukas/Balak*. Yet, this year, we specifically realign by *Chukas/Balak*. Why? What could the difference be?

Pondering the Pearls of *Parshas Pinchas*

The *Bnei Yisaschar* cites an interesting reason. He explains that whenever possible, we attempt to ensure the public reading of *Chalukas Ha'aretz*, the apportioning of *Eretz Yisrael*, during the period of communal mourning known as *Bein Hametzarim*, colloquially called 'The Three Weeks'. This period commemorates the heralding of the beginning of the tragedies that took place prior to the destruction of both *Batei Hamikdash*, from the breaching of the walls of ancient Yerushalayim on the 17th of *Tamuz*, until the actual destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* on the *Tisha B'Av*.

The reason for these readings, which are found in the *parshiyos* of *Pinchas*, *Matos*, and *Masei*, to be *leined* specifically then, is to remind us of Hashem's promise, that although we are currently in *golus*, exile, nevertheless, 'le'eileh techalek ha'aretz,' we will still inherit *Eretz Yisrael*.

A similar assessment is given by the *Minchas Yitzchak*, albeit regarding *Korbanos*, especially the *Korban Tamid*, which is also detailed in *Parshas Pinchas*. He explains that the *Korban Tamid* protected *Klal Yisrael* from sinning with *Avodah Zarah*. When the *Korban Tamid* was no longer offered, it enabled the *Yetzer Hora* of *Avodah Zarah* to strengthen; and it was due to this sinning that eventually led to the *Beis Hamikdash's* destruction.

As such, and since we no longer have *Korbanos*, but at least we still have their recital, in the vein of 'v'neshalmah *parim sifoseinu*', that our *tefillos* are their current replacement, the *leining* of the *Korbanos* is specifically read during the Three Weeks, when we are mourning the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*. This serves to embolden and enable us to fight the reasons and causes for its destruction, and allow its rebuilding.

An additional point the *Bnei Yisaschar* raises is that *Parshas Pinchas* contains the *Parshas HaMoadim*, the reading detailing all the *Yomim Tovim* and their observances. He explains that this is also an apropos reading for the Three Weeks, to comfort us in our time of mourning. This is as the *Navi Zechariah* (Ch. 8:19) prophesized that when the *Geulah* comes, this period will be turned into one of great rejoicing ('l'sasson u'lsimcha ul'moadim tovim').

For all of the above-mentioned reasons, last year, (5782/2022) it was simply not worthwhile for *Chutz La'aretz* to make *Chukas* and *Balak* into a double *Parsha* merely to catch up to *Eretz Yisrael*, since if it would have, then *Parshas Pinchas* will not have fallen out in the Three Weeks. Therefore, it was proper for *Chutz La'aretz* to wait and not catch up to *Eretz Yisrael* until *Matos/Masei*, thus ensuring that *Parshas Pinchas* be *leined* during *Bein Hametzarim*, and enabling us to glean and appreciate its veiled significance and promises for the future.

Yet, this year, the opposite holds true. In 2023, the fast of *Shiva Asar B'Tamuz*, and hence, the start of the Three Weeks, occurs on Sunday, as does its climax, the fast of *Tisha B'Av*, three weeks later. According to our mnemonic rule cited previously, *Parshas Devarim* has to be *Shabbos Chazon*, and the following *parsha*, *Va'eschanan*, is always *Shabbos Nachamu*, directly following *Tisha B'Av*. This means that the preceding week has to already be the double *parsha* of *Matos/Masei*, in order for *Parshas Pinchas* to be recited during the Three Weeks. If we would wait until *Matos/Masei* to realign, as we did last year, then for most of the world *Parshas Pinchas* would not be *leined* during the Three Weeks, but rather preceding it. Hence, the need to correct the calendar before *Shiva Asar B'Tamuz*, in order for *Pinchas* to be *leined* by all of *Klal Yisrael* in the correct time – during the Three Weeks.

The Code for Consolation

The *Maharit* continues that the reason why *Matos* and *Masei* are generally combined is to a similar, yet reverse, reason to *Bamidbar*. As the *Tur* wrote, the code for this time of year is 'Tzumu V'Tzalu', the fast of *Tisha B'Av* is directly before *Va'eschanan*. This is not merely by chance.

Parshas Va'eschanan contains the *pesukim* of 'Ki Soleed Banim U'vnei Vanim V'noshantem Ba'aretz', which although not a pleasant reading, as it is a *tochachah* (rebuke), nevertheless, *Chazal* glean that there is a hidden message of redemption buried within. *V'noshantem* in *Gematria* equals 852, letting us know that after 852 years of living in *Eretz Yisrael*, the *Galus* would start. Yet, we find that the *Galus* actually started two years early, after 850 years. This is because Hashem did not want *chas veshalom* to have to destroy us, and therefore, as a kindness, brought the Exile two years early, to ensure *Klal Yisrael's* survival.

Therefore, explains the *Maharit*, we commonly join up *Matos* and *Masei* to make certain that *Parshas Va'eschanan* is always immediately following *Tisha B'Av* as *Shabbos Nachamu*, thus offering us a message of consolation even amidst the destruction.

In conclusion, although it may seem complicated and confusing, on the contrary, each calendrical calculation is clearly consistent with the clarion call of our *Chazal - Parsha* combination and separation, synchronized to showcase hope and consolation when we need it most, as well as serve as a buffer from condemnation.

*The author wishes to thank Rabbi Dovid Heber of the Star-K, author of
Shaarei Zmanim, for his assistance with this article.*

*This article was written L'Refuah Sheleimah Yissochur Dov ben Rochel Miriam, Rochel Miriam bas Dreiza Liba, and
Yehuda Michoel ben Sarah*

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,
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