

**Wembley Synagogue**

מטות מסעי

Insights from the commentators into the Sidrot of Mattot and Massei

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת... אִישׁ כִּי יָדָר נָדָר - Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes... 'If a man takes a vow to G-d... According to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do.' (30:2-3) Moshe taught all the commandments first to the heads of the tribes and afterwards to the entire community (see Rashi). Why is this emphasised in connection with the laws of vows? Often a candidate for office makes lavish promises. Moreover, when actually in office, he endeavours to impress his constituents that he will perform their every wish, yet when not actually facing them he erases their concerns from his mind. Therefore, Moshe specifically warned the heads of the tribes that their promises and pledges were to be treated seriously. A man shall not desecrate his word, but "whatever comes from his mouth shall he do." (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת... אִישׁ כִּי יָדָר נָדָר - Why was this set of laws, which deals with vows, taught specifically to the heads of the tribes? The Chatam Sofer answers that leaders and public figures often make promises they cannot keep. The Torah here is speaking to leaders. They are warned to keep their word. (Source: The Torah Treasury)

אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - These are the journeys of the Children of Israel (33:1)

This verse alludes to the four exiles that the Jewish nation would endure:

Eileh – Edom (Rome)

Masei – Madai and Paras (Medes and Persia)

Bnei – Bavel (Babylonia)

Yisrael – Yavan (Greece) (Source: A Shabbat Vort)

אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - These are the journeys of the Children of Israel (33:1). According to Rashi the Torah lists all of Israel's journeys in the desert in their order to show us Hashem's kindness. Although Hashem had decreed that Bnei Yisrael would wander in the desert for forty years to atone for having listened to the spies, most of the time they remained encamped. If we study the journeys as they are described in the coming verses, we see that Bnei Yisrael were on the move for only a small percentage of the time.

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת מוֹצְאֵיהֶם לְמַסְעֵיהֶם - Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys by the mouth of G-d, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth." (33:2)

1. Why does the verse start with "*motza'eihem lemase'eihem*" — "their goings forth according to their journeys" — and concludes in the reverse, "*mase'eihem lemotza'eihem*" — "their journeys according to their goings forth?"

2. Why does it say "*al pi Hashem*" — "by the mouth of G-d" — only with "*motza'eihem lemase'eihem*"? During the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness, the itinerary of the Jewish people from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael* consisted of forty-two encampments. While most of them were on the physical journey forward, strangely enough, some were in the opposite direction, back toward Egypt. When the Jewish people submitted to Hashem's Will, they moved forward, coming closer to their destination. At other times, however, they rebelled and wanted to return to Egypt (see Rashi 21:4). The word "*motza'eihem*" refers to their point of origin, and the word "*mase'eihem*" refers to their destination. Moshe recorded all the forty-two encampments, most of which were in the direction of "*motza'eihem*" — from the origination point (Egypt) — "*lemase'eihem*" — enroute to their destination (*Land of Israel*), and all these were "*al pi Hashem*" — "by the word of G-d." Among the forty-two encampments, there were also some which were, however, "*mase'eihem*" — from their destination (*Eretz Yisrael*) — "*lemotza'eihem*" — back to their origination point (Egypt) and these were not "*al pi Hashem*" — "by the mouth of G-d." (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וַיַּעַל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֶל הַר הָהוּר עַל פִּי ה' וַיָּמָת שָׁם... - Aaron the *Kohen* went up to Mount Hor at the word of G-d and died there... in the fifth month on the first of the month."

(33:38) Aharon's death is first recorded in *Parshat Chukat* (20:22 - 29) but there is no mention there of the date. Why is it mentioned here?

Aharon passed away on *Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av*, which is in the middle of the three-week period known as "*bein hametzarim*" – "between the straits." His passing was a very sad event and the *entire* Jewish community mourned (20:29). *Parshat Masei* is always read in the middle of the three weeks and very close to, or on, *Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av*. Therefore, it is appropriate to indicate the date of his passing in this *sidra*. It is particularly appropriate, as we recall the passing of Aharon, to reflect upon his love for his fellow Jews and to endeavour to emulate him. We should love peace and pursue peace, love our fellow creatures and bring them near to the Torah (*Pirkei Avot* 1:12). One of the primary causes of the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* was *sinat chinam* – baseless hatred and animosity (*Yoma* 9b).

את שלש הערים... - The three cities shall you designate on the (other) side of the Jordan, and three cities shall you designate in the Land of Canaan; they shall be cities of refuge. (35:14)

Rashi quotes the Rabbis in the Talmud *Makot* 9a, who note that the number of Cities of Refuge in Ever haYarden (across the Jordan) was disproportionate to the number of residents. On the other side of the Yarden there were only two and a half tribes, in contrast to the nine tribes that lived in Eretz Yisrael. Chazal explain that in Gilaad, which was in Ever haYarden, there were many killers. Ramban adds that although the Cities of Refuge were specifically for unintentional murderers, nonetheless, since there was a high incidence of intentional murder, it stands to reason that these murderers would attempt to conceal their wickedness by making their actions appear to be unintentional. Alternatively, the Maharal explains that the mere fact that there were many intentional murderers in Gilaad indicates that there was a low regard for the value of human life. It, therefore, follows that those who were not murderers, simply tended to be negligent. Thus, there were many preventable, unintentional killings in the area of Ever haYarden. (Source: *Vedibarta Bam*)

עד מות הכהן הגדול - (He shall dwell in it) until the death of the High Priest. (35:25) The High priest (*Kohen Gadol*) carries some of the onus regarding the fatal accidents that occur during his watch, since he should have prayed that these accidents not occur during his tenure. Sforno explains that since there were varied forms of unintentional killings, it was almost impossible for the earthly court to determine the length of time for each individual killer's sentence of exile. Thus, it is left up to Hashem to render His judgment through the medium of an event ordained only by Him. (Source: *Vedibarta Bam*)

עד מות הכהן הגדול - For he must dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the *Kohen Gadol*, and after the death of the *Kohen Gadol* the murderer shall return to the land of his possession." (35:28) According to the *Mishnah (Makkot* 2:6), "The mothers of the *Kohanim Gedolim* would supply the residents of the cities of refuge with food and clothing so that they would not pray that their sons should die."

Why did the mothers donate supplies and not the *Kohanim Gedolim* themselves?

Life in a city of refuge was comfortable. The unintentional murderer was given safety and sustenance. If the *Kohen Gadol* himself would have been the provider of the food and clothing, it would have encouraged a poor person to flee to the city of refuge claiming to be an unintentional murderer so he could remain there with guaranteed room and board until the *Kohen Gadol* died.

Therefore, it was not the *Kohen Gadol* himself who provided for the residents, but his mother. Consequently, it was possible that the *Kohen Gadol's* mother would die shortly after his arrival and the *Kohen Gadol* would survive her by many years, thus leaving the refugee without a guaranteed source of income as long as the *Kohen Gadol* was alive. Hence, it would not be beneficial for him to pretend to be an unintentional murderer because he could end up living many years in a city of refuge without financial aid.

(Source: *Vedibarta Bam*)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 10.15pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html