

Matos Notes

Sarah Jacobs Chandler's Notes

Parashah 42: Parashah 42: Mattot (Tribes) - **Numbers 30:1 through 32:42**
Haftarah (Ketuvim - Writings & Neviim - Prophets): **Jeremiah 1:1 - 2:3**
B'rit Chadashah (N.T.) The Gospels and Emissaries: **Matthew 5:33-37.**

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The Seventeenth Day of Tammuz

This Shabbat falls just after the Fast of Tammuz; which commemorates the **breach** of the walls of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC and before Tisha B'Av, which three weeks later and one day later, remembers the destruction of the First and Second Temples.

Therefore, a special Haftarah (**prophetic** portion) is read: Jeremiah 1:1–2:3.

Tzom Tammuz Jul 14, 2014 Fast commemorating breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by **Nebuchadnezzar**. Babylon breaks through the walls of Jerusalem; begin 3 weeks of mourning for destruction of Temples. 30 day month puts Tisha B'Av 3 weeks and 1 day away

Matot - תּוֹטוֹת — Hebrew for “tribes”. In this Torah portion we will see that Moshe conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Yisra'el. War is waged against the Midianites for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Yisra'el as we studied last week, and the Torah gives us a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the Kohen HaGadol. In the Tanach in Hebrew we see three uses of vows; three words to describe three different kinds of vows. (All three appear in B'Midbar 30.)

The first word is nederim, (Hebrew for vows, commitments commonly translated, or perhaps mistranslated, as "vows") which describes pledging property as an offering to YHWH. Such a pledge is an obligation until fulfilled. In **the Hebrew language** a person does not "pay a pledge" but will "shalom a neder": making peace by fulfilling the obligation. It is a dire consequence to make nederim and not fulfill them, therefore any self-made pledge, stating that the pledge must be fulfilled with the same importance as a halachah is vital as YHWH's follower for one who does not fulfill a neder according to Judaism views, the power of speech as very strong. It is speech that distinguishes humans from animals, and has the power to accomplish a lot for better or for worse. Due to the strength of a neder, and the fact that one must absolutely be fulfilled if made, many pious Jews engage in the practice of saying "b'li neder" after a statement that they will do something, meaning that their statement is not a binding neder in the event they cannot fulfill their pledge due to unforeseen circumstances.

The second word is eesar, which means "bound". Normally it means physically bound: either tied up, imprisoned, or both. But in B'Midbar 30 (only) it is used to discuss a personal promise to "bind your soul", which tradition interprets as temporarily abstaining from food, sex, or other pleasure to better stay focused on YHWH. Someone who "binds their soul" is voluntarily assuming a second kind of obligation (to abstain from pleasure) to reach a spiritual state of heightened innocence.

The third word is shvooah, which is used for an "oath of completion": an interpersonal

obligation. A shvooah is when one person swears (to another) that he/she will do something. In most cases a shvooah is not a spiritual issue. But a person may make a personal eesar public by "swearing to bind his/her soul"; in other words, by making that promise of abstention publicly before witnesses the eesar also becomes a shvooah.

B'Midbar 30 discusses how family relationships affect certain kinds of vows. This chapter is not about the usual shvooah oaths of interpersonal obligations. (With one exception we will describe later, the Torah never claims that people are limited by age or gender in how they may commit to interpersonal obligations.)

B'Midbar 30:3 If a man takes a nedarim to YHWH, or swear an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. This portion teaches the following:

- Only males and married women may publicly "swear to bind their soul". Unmarried women should keep their "binding their soul" private. A husband may negate any of his wife's "binding her soul" vows when he hears of it. A young girl must have such a "binding of her soul" approved by her father. An engaged woman who makes a "binding her soul" vow must okay it with her fiancée.
- A young girl cannot pledge her family's property in a neder vow without her father's permission. A married woman can pledge her own property, but needs her husband's permission to pledge property from "the house of her husband". An engaged woman should not make a neder pledge of property to YHWH. (This makes sense, for she is living in her father's household but a bride-price has already been paid to transfer her to her fiancée's household. So she lacks ownership of the property of the household she lives in, but is not living with the property she has authority over.) Males, widows, and **DIVORCED** women may freely make neder pledges of property.

Summing up: (a) Fathers/husbands own most of the household property and other family members cannot give it away without permission; (b) Self-denial should be private, but may be public for married adults; (c) A woman's self-denial requires the father's/husband's approval.

The strange omission is of requirements for young boys: it seems odd to allow a young boy to freely donate family property to the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

A neder vow is still an appropriate way to help YHWH's people. For example, most communities of Y'shua's followers practice tithing even though Y'shua never told his followers to tithe aside from the feast-day Mishkan tithes. We discussed tithing in an earlier Parashah which was instituted to support the Levite Kohanim because they owned no land and had no source of income; they were devoted to the service of YHWH and the Mishkan. The other "tithes" were to help the widows and orphans who also who had no means to support themselves.

Y'shua taught in Matthew 25:14-30 that non-monetary "talents" we are blessed with may also be appropriate items to dedicate to YHWH in a neder way.

An eesar vow can still aid **prayer**. In Matthew 17:21 Y'shua mentions that self-denial can help our spiritual warfare. Self-denial can also help us focus our energy to metaphorically "feed" our new nature empowered of YHWH's Ruach while "starving" the old nature that is empowered by the flesh.

As Y'shua's bride-to-be we should realize that Y'shua can annul our imagined ways of acting holy and our rash utterances of promised behaviors.

We must not make **deals** with hasatan or pledge away our inheritance. Neither must we

make pledges (or vows) that we do not intend to keep. “When you make a vow to YHVH, delay paying it, for He has no liking for fools; what you vow pay. Better that you do not vow at all than that you vow and do not pay. Let not your mouth bring guilt on your flesh, and do not tell the messenger that it was an error. Why should YHVH be angered by your speech and destroy the work of your hands?” Ecc. 5:3-5. “35. A good man brings forth good from his good treasures, and the evil man brings evil from his evil treasure. 36. I say to you for every vain word that the sons of men speak,* they will give an account of it in the Day of Judgment. 37. For by your words you will be made righteous, and by your words you will be condemned.*” Mt. 12:25-37 AENT FOOTNOTE V. 37 * The targum teaches that the “nephesh chayah” (living soul) in Genesis 2:7 is best understood as the “spirit of speech.” YHWH put a portion of His Spirit in mankind, enabling man to speak and create with words. Our words are being judged accordingly. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue...” (Proverbs 18:21).

The following is from the Garden of Emuna by Rabbi Shalom Arush:

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Binder of blessed and saintly memory stated, “told me that when a person ascends to the Heavenly Court after his one-hundred-twenty-year go-round on this earth, the Heavenly Judges will open a big **BOOK** – the story of that person’s life, where every thought, utterance, and deed is recorded. Each page where it’s written that the person did an hour of personal prayer, the page is turned and that person is not judged for anything that he may have done wrong on that day. But, on the day with no hitbodedut (personal prayer), the person is meticulously judged for every thought, utterance, and deed of that particular day.”

“Now we know why the Evil Inclination (Yetzer Hara) puts up such a fight against personal prayer. Every day is a new war for our hour of hitbodedut. For that reason, we have to be courageous and not give in. Hitbodedut is the gate to connecting with HaShem!”

B’Midbar 30:15 “If her husband shall be silent about her from day to day – he will have let stand all her vows; or all the prohibitions that are upon her, he will have let them stand, for he was silent about her on the day of his hearing.” Your silence is condoning or agreeing with it.

Vows, however, do not always arise from consecration. Quite often they are uttered rashly in times of distress or desperation in an attempt to secure divine help or aid. The challenge, then, is to remember to keep the vow when the trial has passed.

Naturally, the reality is, that sometimes we simply don’t keep the vow or promise we have made, despite our best intentions. We might even forget that we made a vow, but remember that YHVH does not forget and we will give account for every word we utter.

For that reason, we repeat, because of the importance of making a vow, Solomon or Shlomo, (Hebrew: שלמה) -- advises that we not be hasty in making promises to YHWH. We are also advised to be quick in our follow-through when we do go ahead and make a vow. "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before YHWH.... When you make [nadar] a vow [neder] to YHWH, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it." (Ecclesiastes 5:2, 4–5)

An example of a foolish vow, we can look back to Jephthah’s vow in Parashah Chukat. In exchange for a future military victory, he vowed to sacrifice in thanksgiving the first thing to come out of his house when he returned home. Much to his horror, it was his one and only daughter who first came out. (Judges 11:30–39)

B’Midbar 31:1-12 This battle against the Midianites is a “payback” for their responsibility of leading the Children of Yisra’el into sin against YHWH with immorality and idolatry. The

Midianites had plotted the moral destruction through the evil counsel of Balaam and Peor which led to the plague we discussed in our previous Torah portion.

B'Midbar 31:13-24 According to Rashi, "Moshe was angry because the officers had allowed their troops to spare women who were known to have participated in the orgies. Moshe ordered that all the Midianite women except for the very young and innocent... "So now kill every male among the young children, and every woman fit to know a man by lying with a male, you shall kill. But all the young children among women who have not known lying with a male, you may keep alive for yourselves." (vv. 17, 18).

The warriors were made unclean by their contact with the dead, and were therefore required to remain outside the camp for seven days so they could perform ritual purification. All their garments and the spoils of war (utensils, copper, iron etc.) had to be cleansed according to Elazar, the Kohen HaGadol's instructions – this later became known as the laws of hag'alah or "koshering" by passing through fire or by water, This included all the garments worn by the warriors.

Once everything was made clean by hag'alah the spoils were divided amongst the Children of Yisra'el.

B'Midbar 32

We see the two tribes that of Reuben and Gad approached Moshe to ask permission to settle in the pasture land of Gilead, (this was on the east side of the Jordan River). These tribes had large herds of cattle which would benefit from the pasture lands. Moshe was concerned that if these two tribes remained in Gilead the rest of the Children of Yisra'el would be discouraged without these two tribes during their conquest of Eretz Yisra'el; however the leaders of these two tribes promised to join the fight while their families remain in Gilead – Yehoshua was given the task of ensuring their kept this promise or forfeit any claim to the lands in Gilead.

We see at the end of this chapter that half the tribe of Manasseh also joined the tribes of Reuben and Gad when they settled in the pasture lands of Gilead. According to some Jewish sages it is believed that Manasseh was the servant of Yosef who accused the brothers of stealing the ruler's cup, and this caused the brothers to tear their garments (see Gen. 44). Because Manasseh caused this, a portion of his inheritance was torn in half!

Interesting side note: In the book of Yehoshua, we see how the two and a half tribes erected an altar (mizbe'ach) on the east side of the Jordan, nearly causing a civil war among the Israelites (see Joshua 22). Because they were separated from rest of the Children of Yisra'el, these 2 ½ tribes were the first ones taken into captivity by the Assyrians (740BC).

HAFTARAH

Jeremiah 1:1–2:3.

This portion prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple (Beit Hamikdash).

Jeremiah, who lived in the period leading up to the destruction of the Temple, foretells the Babylonian invasion and brings a message of judgment to the Jewish People.

"From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,' declares Elohim." (Jeremiah 1:14–15)

So while there is no direct connection, perhaps, between the Torah portion of Pinchas (which was out last Torah Portion) and the prophetic portion in Jeremiah, they do share this theme: the judgment of a nation because of its sin. YHWH tells Jeremiah that he had been

set apart or consecrated as a prophet even before his birth.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew [yadah] you, before you were born I set you apart [kashash—consecrated]; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5)

To be set apart for service to YHWH is the true meaning of the Hebrew adjective kadosh (קדש) which is usually translated as holy. The Hebrew word for knew in this verse comes from the root yadah (יָדַע), a word commonly used in covenantal language in the Bible.

Rather than delighting in a **RELATIONSHIP** with YHWH, some might derive their joy from their own knowledge, wisdom, might or riches, and even boast in them, perhaps excusing their moral failures because of these privileges.

True privilege, however, is to know YHWH and be known by Him. “But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know [yadah] me and understand that I am Elohim who demonstrates unfailing **LOVE** and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things.” (Jeremiah 9:24)

Isn't this the deepest cry of our hearts—to truly know and be known by another? YHWH placed this desire in our hearts, so it shouldn't amaze us that we can have an **INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP** with the El Shaddai, creator of the Heavens and the Earth.

YHWH gives Jeremiah a vision that conveys both warning and reassurance—the vision of the almond tree.

Jeremiah 1:11-12 “The word of YHWH came to me: ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ ‘I see the branch of an almond tree [shaked],’ I replied. YHWH said to me, ‘You have seen correctly, for I am watching [shoked] to see that My word is fulfilled.’”

Without an understanding of Hebrew, we can totally miss the clever wordplay in this vision.

An almond tree in Hebrew is שקד (shaked), and to be watchful and awake is שָׁקַד (shoked)—the same three consonants, but with different vowel sounds.

YHWH then shows Jeremiah a vision of a boiling pot tilting toward Israel from the north.

Jer. 1:14-16 ““From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land.... I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me.”

The vision of the almond tree, therefore, reveals that YHWH is watching our actions. He sees sin and we will be judged. The fact that the almond tree is one of the first trees to flower after winter alludes to the urgency of repentance, for YHWH is watching.

The vision of the almond tree also speaks of restoration.

We see this later in Jeremiah when YHWH makes the following promise that refers back to the vision of the almond tree: “Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 31:28)

This special portion of the Haftarah Pinchas ends with the assurance that Israel is kadosh (holy, set apart) for YHWH.

“Yisra'el is set aside [kadosh—holy] for YHWH, the Firstfruits of His harvest; all who devour her will incur guilt; evil will overtake them,’ says YHWH.” (Jeremiah 2:3)

This is a word of warning: in the heavenly courts, the enemies of Israel are pronounced

guilty and they will be judged accordingly. One cannot be anti-Semitic and still expect to see YHWH's full blessing upon their lives. YHWH has promised the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchaq, and Yaakov (Yisra'el) that He "will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you." (Genesis 12:3)

Just as Jeremiah had a special destiny, so does Israel because YHWH designated it as kadosh—set apart to Him for special service.

YHWH is watching over His Word to perform it, and He certainly will restore Israel in these end times as He has promised.

YHWH also promises that He will deliver us. He tells Jeremiah in this Haftarah: "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified.... They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 1:17–19)

Over and over again in Scripture, YHWH tells us, "Fear not, for I am with you. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10; 2 Chron. 20:15-22)

We need not be afraid, even when something (or someone) comes against us, for YHWH promises His help. The battle is the Elohim's. We need only stand firm in faith, trusting in the Word.

In this Haftarah portion, YHWH calls Himself Makor Mayim Chayim—The Source of Living Water. (Jeremiah 2:13; see also Jeremiah 17:13)

Y'shua also proclaimed Himself to be the source of living water on the last day of the water pouring ceremony during the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles).

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures have said, streams of living water [mayim chayim] will flow from within him." (John 7:37–38)

Y'shua was speaking of the Spirit of the Living YHWH, and when we drink of these living waters, we not only find life, but we refresh the lives of others as that living water flows out from us.

Only through the power of these living waters can we victoriously pass through our own critical transition periods and enter into the full blessings that YHWH has for those who obey His commandments.

During this time, the Three Weeks of Sorrow there are three Haftarot that are read. In these three Jeremiah tells of the punishments that would occur to the people who did not return to the way of YHWH, these readings also promise redemption if the people do return to the way of YHWH – like us today – it all boils down to choice. Which choice do you make?

B'RIT CHADASHAH

B'rit Chadashah (N.T.) The Gospels and Emissaries: Matthew 5:33-37.

All of our vows must be for truth, justice, and righteousness, through a lifestyle of habitual awareness of YHWH, studying scripture, fearing YHWH, seeking Him at all times, and receiving correction.

Master Y'shua stated in Matthew 5:33-37. "33 Again you have heard that it has been said to those before that you should not lie in your oath. But **COMPLETE** your oath to Master

YHWH. 34. But I say, you should not say I swear, not by heaven because that is the throne of Elohim. 35. And not by the earth because it is the footstool that is beneath his feet, and not by Urishlim because it is the city of the great king. 36. And not by your head should you swear, because you are not able to make in it one part of the hair black or white. 37. But your word should be but yes, yes, no and no, anything more than these is from evil.”

If you notice this ties in directly with our first Torah portion about the vows we make – to sum it up we must be honest in all our dealings, we need to do what we say we will do and not speak with a forked tongue!

Joshua Santana - Yehoshua Ari Shofar

Mattot Notes

Parsha Mattot

Rashi

Ch. 30

Verse 3

a vow: By saying, “It shall be prohibited just like a sacrifice, that I will not eat, or I will not do a certain thing.” One might think that even if he swears to eat carrion, I apply to him “according to whatever came out of his mouth, he shall do.” Scripture therefore states, “to prohibit”-to prohibit what is permitted, but not to permit what is prohibited. — [Sifrei Mattoth 7]

he shall not violate his word: Heb. לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ, like לֹא יַחַלֵּל דְּבָרוֹ “he shall not profane his word,” he shall not treat his word as being unholy. — [Sifrei Mattoth 8]

Ch. 31

Verse 6

them along with Phinehas: This shows that Phinehas equaled them all (Sifrei Mattoth 34). Why did Phinehas go, and Eleazar did not go? The Holy One, blessed is He, said, “The one who began the mitzvah by killing Cozbi the daughter of Zur, should finish it” (Mid.

Tanchuma Mattoth 3). Another interpretation: He sought the vengeance of Joseph, his maternal grandfather, for it says, “And the Medanites sold him” (Gen. 37:36) (Sifrei Mattoth 34, Sotah 43a). How do we know that the Phinehas’s mother was [descended] from Joseph? Because it says, “[Eleazar the son of Aaron took himself one] of the daughters of Putiel (פּוּטִיֵּאל)” (Exod. 6:25) [meaning] of the descendants of Jethro, who fattened (פָּטַף) calves for idolatry, and from the descendants of Joseph, who made light of (פָּטַף) his passion and prevailed over it [when he was tempted by Potiphar’s wife]. Another interpretation: He was [the kohen] anointed for war. — [Sotah 43a]

the sacred utensils: The holy Ark (Sifrei Mattoth 34, Num. Rabbah 22:4) and the golden showplate (Mid. Aggadah), since Balaam was with them and through sorcery was able to make the Midianite kings fly, and he flew along with them, he [Phinehas] showed them the showplate on which God’s Name was engraved, and they fell down [to earth]. For this reason it says, concerning the Midianite kings, “upon their slain” (verse 8), for they fell from the air on top of those slain. Likewise, it says in the book of Joshua (13:22) in connection with Balaam, “upon (sic) their slain.” - [Mid. Tanchuma Mattoth 4]

Verse 8

with the sword: He came against Israel and exchanged his craft for theirs. For they are victorious only with their mouths, through prayer and supplication, and he came and adopted their craft to curse them with his mouth. So they too came against him by exchanging their craft for the craft of the nations, who come with the sword, as it says [concerning Esau], “And you shall live by your sword” (Gen. 27:40). - [See Mid. Tanchuma Balak 8]

Verse 21

Eleazar the kohen...: Since Moses came to a state of anger, he came to err, for the laws of purging gentile vessels eluded him. A similar incident happened on the eighth day of the investitures [of the kohanim], as it says, “He [Moses] became angry with Eleazar and Ithamar” (Lev. 10: 16); he came to a state of anger, so he came to err. Similarly, in the episode of “Now listen, you rebels... and struck the rock” (20:10-11); through anger, he came to err. — [Sifrei Mattoth 48]

Verse 23

whatever is used in fire: For cooking anything

shall pass through fire: It is purged in the manner it is used. If it is used in hot water, it must be purged in hot water, and if it is used for roasting, such as a spit or grill, it must be made to glow in fire. — [A.Z. 75b]

it must, however, [also] be cleansed with sprinkling water: According to its simple meaning, this sprinkling was to cleanse it from contamination by a corpse. He said to them, “The vessels require purging to cleanse them from the [absorption of] forbidden [food], and sprinkling to cleanse them of [spiritual] uncleanness [caused by a corpse].” Our Rabbis expounded from here that even to make them fit for use [after contamination] from forbidden food, ritual immersion was required for metal utensils. They expound מֵי טָהוֹרָה written here to mean water fit for a menstruant [Heb. מֵי טָהוֹרָה] to immerse herself in. How much is that? Forty 'seah.' - [A.Z. 75b and whatever is not used in fire: Anything which is not used in fire such as ewers, cups, and jugs, all of which are used for cold [food] and did not absorb forbidden food. — [A.Z. 75b]

shall be passed through water: He immerses them and that is sufficient. This refers only to metal utensils. — [A.Z. 75b, Sifrei Mattoth 50]

Ch. 32

Verse 7

Why do you discourage: You turn aside and dissuade their hearts from crossing, for they will think that you are afraid to cross because of the war and the strength of the cities and the people.

Verse 19

for our inheritance has come to us: We have already received it on the eastern side.

Verse 24

and what has proceeded from your mouth you shall do: for the sake of the Most High [God], for you have undertaken to cross over for battle until [the completion of] conquest and the apportionment [of the Land]. Moses had asked of them only “and... will be conquered before the Lord, afterwards you may return,” (verse 22), but they undertook, “until... has taken possession” (verse 18). Thus, they added that they would remain seven years while it was divided, and indeed they did so (see Josh. 22).

Verse 28

commanded... concerning them: Heb. לָקָם, like עֲלֵיהֶם, concerning them, and concerning [the fulfillment of] their condition, he appointed Eleazar and Joshua, as in, “the Lord will fight for you (לָקָם)” (Exod. 14:14) [not “to you”].

Verse 32

and then we shall have the possession of our inheritance: That is to say, the possession of our inheritance on this side [of the Jordan] will be in our hands and under our ownership.

Verse 38

Nebo and Baal-Meon, their names having been changed: Nebo and Baal Meon were names of pagan deities, and the Amorites named their towns after their deities, and the descendants of Reuben changed their names to other names. This is the meaning of “their names having been changed”-Nebo and Baal-Meon, changed to another name.

Verse 39

driving out: As the Targum [Onkelos] renders, וְתָרִיד, and drove out, for the word רִישׁ can be used in two [different] ways, in the sense of יְרוּשָׁה, ‘inheritance,’ or in the sense of הוֹרְשָׁה ‘driving out,’ meaning to expel or oust. — [Machbereth Menachem p. 167]

And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes (30:2)

This was the procedure with all the laws that Moses taught: first he would teach them to Aaron and the heads of the tribes, and then he would instruct the people, as described in [Exodus 34:31-32](#).

Why are the tribal heads particularly mentioned by the laws of vows? To teach us that an expert Torah scholar has the ability to annul vows like a tribunal of three laymen.

(Talmud; Rashi)

A man who shall vow a vow (30:3)

Vows are a means to asceticism.

(Ethics of the Fathers 3:13)

Ascetism leads to purity, purity leads to holiness, holiness leads to humility, humility leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to saintliness, saintliness leads to the [possession of] the holy spirit, and the holy spirit leads to eternal life.

(Talmud, Avodah Zarah 20b)

Avenge the vengeance of the children of Israel upon the Midianites (31:2)

Why only upon the Midianites but not the Moabites (who also sent their daughter to cause Israel to sin)? Because the Moabites got involved because they feared Israel (cf. [Numbers 22:2-6](#)); but the Midianites entered a fight that was not theirs.

Another explanation G-d said to spare the Moabites because of "two fine creatures which I shall extract from them" -- Ruth the Moabite and Naamah the Ammonite (wife of King Solomon).

(Rashi)

The Hebrew word *midian* means "strife". Midian is the essence of divisiveness, which is the root of all evil.

Thus our Sages speak of "groundless hatred" as the greatest of evils. In truth *all* strife is groundless hatred: the so called "grounds" that people and nations have for hating and destroying each other are but the various façades of the divisive "I" of Midian -- the ego that belies the common source and goal of humanity and views the very existence of others as an encroachment upon the self.

On the cosmic level, G-d is the ultimate oneness, and everything G-dly in our world bears the stamp of His unity. All evil derives from the distortion of this oneness by the veil of divisiveness in which G-d shrouds His creation.

So before the people of Israel could conquer the "seven nations" that inhabited the Land of Canaan -- which represent the seven negative traits of the heart -- they first had to destroy Midian, which is their source and cause. This is also why the destruction of Midian could only be achieved under the leadership of Moses, who embodied the traits of utter self-abnegation, (and thus) harmony and truth.

(Maamar Heichaltzu 5659)

And Moses spoke to the people: "Arm yourselves... to take G-d's vengeance on Midian" (31:3)

G-d had said to Moses, "Avenge the vengeance of the children of Israel upon the Midianites"; yet Moses said: "To take G-d's vengeance on Midian"!

G-d said to Israel: It is you who have an account to settle with them, for they caused Me to harm you. But Moses said: Master of the worlds! If we had been uncircumcised, or idol-worshippers, or had denied the mitzvot, the Midianites would not have hated us. They only persecute us on account of the Torah and the precepts which You have given us!

Consequently the vengeance is Yours; and so I say: "To take G-d's vengeance on Midian."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

"To take G-d's vengeance on Midian" -- for whoever stands against Israel, stands against G-d.

(Rashi)

G-d sees the war on Midian as avenging Israel, for G-d's foremost concern is for His people; the people of Israel see the war as avenging G-d, for they are concerned only with the honor of G-d.

(The Chassidic Masters)

And Moses sent them to the war... them and Pinchas the son of Elazar the priest (31:6)

G-d charged Moses with the mission, yet he sends others! But since Moses had grown up in the land of Midian, he thought: It is not right that I should punish one who has done good to me. The proverb says: "A well from which you drank, cast not a stone into it."

(Midrash Rabbah)

And Moses sent...Pinchas the son of Elazar the priest (31:6)

Why did he send Pinchas? He said: "The one who began the mitzvah shall finish it. It was Pinchas who turned away G-d's wrath from Israel and smote the Midianite woman; let him finish the sacred task."

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

And they warred against Midian, as G-d commanded Moses (31:7)

When laying siege on a city to conquer it, we do not surround it from all four sides, but only from three sides, leaving a way to escape for anyone who wishes to flee for his life. As it is written: "And they warred against Midian, as G-d commanded Moses"; it has been handed down by tradition that this is what G-d had commanded him.

(Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings and their Wars 6:7)

Also Balaam the son of Beor they slew with the sword (31:8)

What was Balaam doing in Midian? Rabbi Jonathan said: He went to receive his reward for the twenty-four thousand Israelites whose destruction he had caused [by his advice to entice them with the daughters of Moab and Midian] ... This is what people say: "When the camel went to demand horns, they cut off the ears he had."

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 106a)

So did your fathers... (32:8)

If Moses initially saw their request as the equivalent of the Spies' shunning of the Holy Land, why did he, at the end, agree to their proposal, and even expand on it, by adding half the tribe of Menasseh to the tribes of Reuben and Gad?

(The fact that they pledged to participate in other tribes' conquest of the Land only answered the first part of Moses' complaint to them --

"Shall your brethren go to war, and you sit here?" -- but not the other, seemingly more grave accusation, namely that they are repeating the sin of the Spies in spurning the Land, which had caused that entire generation to die out in the desert!)

The explanation is to be found in the first words of the response given by the men of Reuben and Gad to Moses: "We will build sheepfolds here for our sheep, and cities for our young."

Chassidic teaching explains the sin of the Spies as resulting from a reluctance to assume the mission of "settling the Land". Though they knew that the very purpose of creation is to "Make for G-d a dwelling in the lowly (i.e., physical) world", they believed themselves incapable of carrying out this mission. "It is a land that consumes its settlers!" the Spies cried upon their return from their survey of the Land. How could they be sure that once they involved themselves with the land, they would not be overwhelmed by its corporeality? How could they know whether they would indeed exploit its lofty potential and not instead sink into the morass of material life?

When the people of Reuben and Gad came forward with their request, Moses thought that he was again meeting with a refusal by a group of "spiritualists" shunning the Divinely-ordained mission to develop the Land.

In truth, however, it was not the dread of the material that motivated these two tribes to remain east of the Jordan. On the contrary: they wanted to *settle* these lands, to build cities and ranches, to raise their sheep and cattle on its pastures. Their plea, "Do not take us across the Jordan" did not express a reluctance to seek out the potential for holiness contained in the Land, but an attraction to even more remote -- and thus even loftier -- "sparks of G-dliness."

After all, the land west of the Jordan, though material, was the "Holy Land" -- a land where even the most mundane pursuits are touched with a spiritual glow. Outside of the Holy Land, the physical world is *more* lowly, and thus contains sparks of Divinity that derive from an even higher source. The tribes of Reuben and Gad were convinced that their mission in life was to pursue, extract and elevate the "sparks" inherent in this more spiritually distant corner of creation.

When they said to Moses, "We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle and cities for our children," Moses understood that what they were seeking was not an escape from the Land, but the opportunity to "make a home for G-d" in an even lowlier domain -- in the territories that lie beyond the borders of the most sacred of lands as defined by Israel's present mandate from G-d.

(From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And you shall be guiltless towards G-d and towards Israel (32:22)

The Sages taught: Always appoint at least two people together as trustees over public funds. Even Moses, who enjoyed the full trust of G-d--as it is written, "In all My house, he is trusted"--figured the accounts of the Sanctuary together with others, as it says: "By the hand of Itamar the son of Aaron" ([Exodus 38:21](#)).

Thus the Sages taught: the one who made the appropriation [of the monies donated to the Holy Temple] did not enter the chamber wearing either a hemmed cloak or shoes or sandals or *tefillin* or an amulet (i.e., nothing in which money can be hidden); lest if he became poor people might say that he became poor because of an iniquity committed in the chamber, or if he became rich people might say that he became rich from the monies in the chamber. For it is a man's duty to be free of [blame](#) before men as before G-d, as it is said: "And you shall be guiltless towards G-d and towards Israel."

(Midrash Tanchuma; Mishnah, Shekalim 3:2)

And Moses said to them... "Build cities for your young, and sheepfolds for your sheep" (32:24)

They, on the other hand, had said, "We will build sheepfolds here for our sheep, and cities for our young" (v. 16) giving precedence to their cattle over their children. Said Moses to them: Not so! Make the primary thing primary, and the secondary thing secondary.

(Rashi)

If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over the Jordan... (32:29)

Rabbi Meir said: Every stipulation which is not like that of the children of Gad and the children of Reuben is not legally binding. For it is written: "And Moses said unto them: If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over the Jordan, [... you shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession]," and it is also written, "But if they will not pass over with you armed, then they shall have possessions among you in the Land of Canaan." (I.e., both sides of the condition have to be spelled out -- if the condition is fulfilled, then so-and-so will be the case, but if the stipulation is not fulfilled, then so-and so will be the case.)

(Talmud, Kiddushin 61a)

And half the tribe of Menasseh (32:33)

Because Menasseh caused the sons of Jacob to rend their clothes by hiding Joseph's goblet in Benjamin's sack (cf. [Genesis 44:13](#)), his tribe was rent in two, half receiving its portion in the lands east of the Jordan, and half on the west.

(Midrash Rabbah)

And Moses gave the Gilead to Machir the son of Menasseh... And Yair the son of Menasseh went and conquered their villages... (32:40-41)

We learned: Yair the son of Menasseh and Machir the son of Menasseh were born in the days of Jacob, and did not die before Israel entered the Land. (But does it not say, "And there was not left a man of [the generation of the desert], save Caleb the son of Yefuneh, and Joshua the son of Nun"? Said Rav Acha bar Yaakov: The decree was directed neither against those under twenty years of age, nor against those over sixty years of age.)

Chapter 30

3 If a man makes a vow: By taking a vow, a person forbids himself from some activity that the Torah otherwise permits. In a sense, then, these laws can be seen as a continuation of the lesson of Pinchas: that there are times and exigencies that dictate going beyond the prescriptions and proscriptions of the Torah. What are these circumstances?

In general, the Torah divides all we can do in this world into three categories: what we *must* do, what we *may* do, and what we *must not* do. The things we *must* do are essential for our fulfillment of our role as bearers of God's message on earth. The things we *may* do are not essential but can, if used properly, enhance our spiritual lives and the fulfillment of our purpose. The things we *must not* do are detrimental to our purposes. Under normal circumstances, these aspects of reality cannot be elevated to Divine consciousness by our efforts.

The middle ground is obviously the most fluid. As mentioned, things that fall into this category can become positive forces in life if we use them with the proper intentions. To do so, however, a person has to possess sufficient spiritual fortitude not to be sucked into the sensuality of the material experience and thereby lose his Divine orientation.

On a collective scale, the ability of the Jewish people to elevate certain aspects of this neutral ground has fluctuated throughout history. When the Temple stood, for example, the revelation of the Divine presence in its precincts imbued even the common folk with a certain amount of holiness that was lacking in subsequent eras. This is the reason behind the various rabbinic decrees and prohibitions that have been added to Jewish observance over time. Most of these originated after the loss of the holy Temple.

Similarly, every individual goes through periods in his life when he is more or less fit to indulge in this or that material pleasure. In general, if a person can indulge in a pleasure that God has put in this world for our enjoyment without compromising his Divine consciousness, he is encouraged to do so. "In the future, every person will be called to account for the pleasures that he encountered but did not partake of,"¹ the sages said. And of a person who took too many vows, they said, "Is that which the Torah has forbidden not enough for you, that you must seek to prohibit yourself from other things as well?!"²

But when a person sees that a particular indulgence affects him negatively, he should at least temporarily renounce it. If he feels incapable of resisting the urge to overindulge, he can make a formal vow, which forbids the indulgence to him just as if it had been forbidden by the Torah. Thus, the sages say, "vows foster abstinence."³ If, on the other hand, he feels that he is capable of controlling himself, it is better to abstain from the

indulgence without the formality of a vow. Regarding this, the sages say, “sanctify yourself with that which is permitted to you.”⁴ In either case, every individual must be honest with himself about which aspects of life he is ready to elevate and which he is not, and what lengths he must go to in order to curb his appetites.⁵ By guarding himself from things that would be detrimental to his Divine consciousness, a person both weakens materialism’s power over him and increases the power of holiness within him. This, too, gives him more power to resist evil.⁶

Nonetheless, the Torah states that there are specific individuals who can annul vows that others make. This means, in effect, that such individuals are able to grant someone who, on his own, might not be ready to tackle a certain aspect of reality, the ability to do so. Certainly, this is the preferred approach, inasmuch as it both elevates the spiritual stature of the individual and enables him to elevate the spiritual level of a greater part of his environment.

This further explains why the laws of vows and oaths were taught now, as the Jewish people were preparing to enter the Land of Israel. The purpose of their entry, we know, was to make the physical world a home for God. This they were to do by engaging in the physical work of occupying and working the land and, in general, earning a living and sustaining themselves from the earth’s raw materials—all for holy purposes and with holy intentions. Thus, although a person’s involvement with physicality may on occasion require him to swear off some aspect of it, he must always remember that the purpose of his life is ideally accomplished by annulling such vows and partaking of life’s bounties in holiness.⁷

If a man makes a vow: If a person consecrates fruit as a sacrifice for the Temple, even though fruit cannot be used for such a purpose, it becomes holy and it is forbidden to eat it. This is because he can indeed sanctify an animal for sacrificial purposes and cause it to be forbidden for other mundane uses.⁸ The power to consecrate extends beyond the realm of its fundamental sphere of influence.

This teaches us the magnificent power of speech. We are empowered to transform the mundane into the holy, to elevate a simple beast into a sacrifice simply by stating such an intention. Certainly, we must then be careful to use this gift only for the loftiest and most desirable ends.⁹

He shall not violate his word: The word for “violate” in Hebrew (*yachel*) comes from the word for “profane” or “unholy” (*chol*). The inner meaning of this verse is therefore that a person should not make his word “profane”; even our most mundane matters should also be imbued with holy intentions and be consistent with the greater purpose of Creation, making a home for God in this world.¹⁰

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This is because God commanded the Jewish people to take vengeance against Midian because they enticed them into the idolatry of *Pe'or*.¹⁸ No Midianite territory was captured or annexed to the Land of Israel. As we mentioned previously, the idolatry of *Pe'or* is essentially hedonism: the indulgence in sensual pleasure as an end in itself rather than for the higher purpose of experiencing Divinity or infusing Divinity into reality. This attitude toward life is the antithesis of the lifework of Moses. Hedonism implies that physical pleasures are either too “low” and vulgar to serve Divine purposes or are somehow off-limits for the holy life. Moses, the channel through whom God gave the Torah, championed the truth that Godliness can and must pervade all of reality; it must even dictate our approach to physical pleasures. In fact, if anything, Moses’ lifework proclaimed that it is *specifically* in the lowest end of creation that the potential for Divinity is the greatest. He used this argument to wrest the Torah from the angels and expose the error of the spies. Unfortunately, the misconstruction of this appreciation for the lowest rungs of spirituality led to the error of *Pe'or*. In order to wipe out the source of this error, Moses’ inspiration and example was necessary.

This theoretical groundwork, which destroys the philosophy of *Pe'or*’s mental stranglehold, is sufficient to prevent a person from falling into the trap in the future. But to “avenge” the evil, i.e., to repair the damage already done and root out any trace of its effect that might surface sometime in the future, more is required than the detached arguments of a philosophical theoretician. The battle itself was therefore led by Pinchas, because Pinchas embodied the ethic and zeal of self-sacrifice. The inspired zeal that makes a person incensed enough to go beyond the letter of the law—and even risk his life—reveals a higher, purer level of motive and consciousness than normal.

Similarly, in our personal confrontation with the deception of *Pe'or*, we need to emulate both Moses and Pinchas. From Moses we learn to cultivate the proper, Jewish attitude toward materialism and its sensuality; from Pinchas we learn to attack its effects on us with righteous indignation.¹⁹

3 The revenge of God against Midian: The word “Midian” in Hebrew is derived from the word for “strife” or “argument” (*madon*).²⁰

This evil of baseless hatred had to be eliminated before we entered the Land of Israel, since baseless hatred is obviously at odds with the harmonious functioning of society that is the prerequisite for attaining *any* national goals, let alone that of promulgating Divinity in the world. Indeed, the Jews succumbed to this evil during the era of the second Temple and this is what brought about the Temple’s destruction and the present exile.²¹

The root of baseless hatred is ego. An egocentric person feels threatened by anyone who opposes (or seems to oppose) his inflated sense of self. Any positive quality evinced by the other person diminishes his own importance, so the egocentric person will desperately

seek to delegitimize the other person. Although he may not seek to actively harm him, he will be secretly pleased when the other person suffers, or at least not be troubled. Furthermore, egocentricity blinds a person to other people's good qualities; since he is not sincere in his relationship with God and the world, he cannot believe that others are, either.

In contrast, someone who is not plagued with egocentricity will focus only on other people's good qualities. Their suffering will genuinely trouble him, since he will judge them favorably and find no justification for their suffering. If he does find some fault with someone else, he will admonish him in accordance with the Torah's guidelines for doing so, but he will not hate him.

Similarly, rather than viewing differences of opinion as an affront to his selfhood, the selfless person will view them as opportunities to arrive at higher, more comprehensive perceptions of truth. His lack of concern for his own image will also enable him to bare his shortcomings to another person and seek his guidance, thereby allowing him to solve his problems and progress in his self-refinement.[22](#)

Whoever is an enemy of the Jewish people is an enemy of God: This idea is expressed specifically in the context of the war with Midian because the Midianites in fact attacked both God and the Jewish people. They sought to physically destroy the Jews, and the means they used to try to do this was to entice them into sin, thus attacking God.[23](#)

Whoever is an enemy of the Jewish people is an enemy of God: The vengeance God sought against Midian was in response to the death of thousands of Jews that resulted from the encounter with Midian. These Jews died because the Midianite women enticed them into idol worship and moral transgressions. We see here how much God loves His people: He considers someone who opposes and attacks even transgressors such as these as if he had attacked God Himself.[24](#)

Inner Dimensions

[3] The revenge of God against Midian: The Name of God used in this verse is the Name *Havayah*, indicating that the evil embodied by Midian opposes specifically this Name of God.

The Name *Havayah* (which means "the One who brings into being") alludes to the various forces of God's energy He used and uses to create the world. These creative forces are different and even opposing, but they function harmoniously because they exhibit no self-assertion; they exist only to actualize God's creative will. Thus, the Midianite egocentrism that spawns contention and strife undermines the harmonious functioning of the forces God uses to continuously create the world.

This is an additional reason why this war had to be led by Moses. The only way for there to be cooperation and peace between people in this world is when they submit to the higher authority of the Torah. Firstly, without this submission, who is to say whose authority is more legitimate? Secondly, the Torah itself fosters peace, as it is said, “its ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.” Since Moses was both the channel through whom God gave the Torah and the personification of selflessness, he had to lead the war against Midian.[25](#)

Chassidic Insights for Parshah Matot

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4 If a woman makes a vow : The following individuals can annul a woman’s vows:

- A father can annul his daughter’s vows as long as she is not married;
- a betrothed woman’s fiancé and father can together annul her vows; and
- a husband can annul his wife’s vows.

The man in question can annul his daughter’s/fiancé’s/wife’s vows if they are in some way detrimental to her (or in the case of the fiancé/husband, detrimental to their relationship), and his annulment actually contravenes the force of her vow, thereby canceling it.

In addition, a sage or rabbinical court can invalidate any individual’s vows if his vow is proving more of a hindrance than a help in his life and/or relationship with God. In this case, however, the sage or court do not have the legal authority to *annul* the vow;[11](#) they rather interrogate the individual and determine whether he would have made the vow had he known it would lead to the present consequences. If the answer is “no,” it is established that the vow was made under false pretenses and is therefore retroactively void.

The annulment of the father/fiancé/ husband is analogous to the case in which a person has made a formal vow but is ready to progress to the point where he no longer needs it, since he can restrain himself on his own. Such an individual still needs to abstain from worldly pleasures in some way, but he is ready—with the proper inspiration—to do so without the legal crutch of the vow.

The invalidation of the vow by the sage or court is analogous to the case in which a person is successfully restraining himself on his own but is now ready to ascend to the maturity of consciousness in which the material world poses no threat to his Divine orientation. He can partake of the world’s pleasures in a Godly way. The sage or court, in this case, simply has to reveal the latent, inner Divinity of the individual’s soul; this releases him from his need for abstinence. In fact, it becomes retroactively evident that, had he manifested this level of consciousness all along, there would have been no need for abstinence to begin with.[12](#)

If a woman makes a vow: A father can annul vows his daughter makes *before* her marriage. A husband can annul vows his wife makes *after* her marriage. A fiancé, since he acts together with the father, can annul vows his fiancée made *before* her betrothal, i.e., even before he established any connection with her. Thus, in this sense, a man possesses greater power over his wife’s vows when he is only her fiancé than he will when he becomes her husband.

Allegorically, the relationship between God and the Jewish people is analogous to that of a married couple. Exile is similar to the state of betrothal: the relationship has been established, but it will only be consummated with marriage, the Redemption. This idea applies to each Jew's own personal relationship with God. When his consciousness of God is full and consummate, he is in a state of redemption, and is "married." When his Divine consciousness is suspended or latent, he is in exile, and is only "betrothed." Since he is "betrothed" to God, he has indeed renounced all other "relationships," and the world's various diversions have no sway over him. But he can produce no "offspring"—truly good deeds, which increase Divine consciousness in reality—until he is "married."

Still, there is an advantage to the state of "betrothal." A fiancé knows that he cannot annul his fiancé's vows on his own; he needs the help of the father in order to do this. He is thus protected from falling into the trap of self-reliance and egocentricity. Similarly, one who knows that he has not yet consummately united with God knows that he still needs His help in elevating the world's materiality. He is spared the feeling of self-reliance that endangers someone who has achieved full Divine consciousness.

Furthermore, thanks to his reliance on the father, the fiancé can annul vows made prior to the betrothal. Allegorically, this means that when a Jew relies on and elicits God (the Father)'s help, he can overcome his relationship with materialism, his connection to the world before his "betrothal." Since materialism is ingrained into the reality of our world and we are naturally entrenched in it, it is virtually impossible for an individual to free himself of its shackles on his own.

The ideal then, is to preserve the feeling of being only "betrothed" to God even after having become "married." This is made possible by remembering that since God is infinite, there are infinite levels of relationship to be attained with Him, and therefore, every consummation of consciousness becomes a state of "betrothal" relative to the higher state of consummation to come.¹³

a closer look

[7] If she becomes betrothed: The terms "betrothed" [אירוסיין, *eirusin*] and "fiancé(e)" [ארוס/ה, *arus(ah)*] as used here indicate a precise and binding legal status between the man and woman, contracted by specific legal procedures. In Jewish law, "betrothal" is an intermediate state between singlehood and marriage, in which the couple are legally husband and wife but are not yet allowed to live together or cohabit.¹⁴ Betrothal cannot be dissolved simply by consent; if the betrothed couple wish to separate they must undergo a halachic divorce.¹⁵ In ancient times, it was customary for couples to become betrothed and then married 12 months later, in order to give the families time to prepare for the wedding.¹⁶ Nowadays, this practice has been largely discontinued, and halachic betrothal takes place as the first part of the marriage ceremony. Thus, when couples today decide to get married, they should never be referred to as being "betrothed" [*arusim*], but only as being "engaged" [*mishtadchim*, etc.].¹⁷

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3 The revenge of God against Midian: The word “Midian” in Hebrew is derived from the word for “strife” or “argument” (*madon*).²⁰

This evil of baseless hatred had to be eliminated before we entered the Land of Israel, since baseless hatred is obviously at odds with the harmonious functioning of society that is the prerequisite for attaining *any* national goals, let alone that of promulgating Divinity in the world. Indeed, the Jews succumbed to this evil during the era of the second Temple and this is what brought about the Temple’s destruction and the present exile.²¹

The root of baseless hatred is ego. An egocentric person feels threatened by anyone who opposes (or seems to oppose) his inflated sense of self. Any positive quality evinced by the other person diminishes his own importance, so the egocentric person will desperately

seek to delegitimize the other person. Although he may not seek to actively harm him, he will be secretly pleased when the other person suffers, or at least not be troubled. Furthermore, egocentricity blinds a person to other people's good qualities; since he is not sincere in his relationship with God and the world, he cannot believe that others are, either.

In contrast, someone who is not plagued with egocentricity will focus only on other people's good qualities. Their suffering will genuinely trouble him, since he will judge them favorably and find no justification for their suffering. If he does find some fault with someone else, he will admonish him in accordance with the Torah's guidelines for doing so, but he will not hate him.

Similarly, rather than viewing differences of opinion as an affront to his selfhood, the selfless person will view them as opportunities to arrive at higher, more comprehensive perceptions of truth. His lack of concern for his own image will also enable him to bare his shortcomings to another person and seek his guidance, thereby allowing him to solve his problems and progress in his self-refinement.[22](#)

Whoever is an enemy of the Jewish people is an enemy of God: This idea is expressed specifically in the context of the war with Midian because the Midianites in fact attacked both God and the Jewish people. They sought to physically destroy the Jews, and the means they used to try to do this was to entice them into sin, thus attacking God.[23](#)

Whoever is an enemy of the Jewish people is an enemy of God: The vengeance God sought against Midian was in response to the death of thousands of Jews that resulted from the encounter with Midian. These Jews died because the Midianite women enticed them into idol worship and moral transgressions. We see here how much God loves His people: He considers someone who opposes and attacks even transgressors such as these as if he had attacked God Himself.[24](#)

Inner Dimensions

[3] The revenge of God against Midian: The Name of God used in this verse is the Name *Havayah*, indicating that the evil embodied by Midian opposes specifically this Name of God.

The Name *Havayah* (which means "the One who brings into being") alludes to the various forces of God's energy He used and uses to create the world. These creative forces are different and even opposing, but they function harmoniously because they exhibit no self-assertion; they exist only to actualize God's creative will. Thus, the Midianite egocentrism that spawns contention and strife undermines the harmonious functioning of the forces God uses to continuously create the world.

This is an additional reason why this war had to be led by Moses. The only way for there to be cooperation and peace between people in this world is when they submit to the higher authority of the Torah. Firstly, without this submission, who is to say whose

authority is more legitimate? Secondly, the Torah itself fosters peace, as it is said, “its ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.” Since Moses was both the channel through whom God gave the Torah and the personification of selflessness, he had to lead the war against Midian.[25](#)

4 From all the tribes of Israel: Unlike other wars, the Levites were conscripted to fight in this one and took a portion of the booty. This is because the purpose of this war, as we said, was to uproot the idolatry of *Pe'or*, the misuse and abuse of gross materiality. The Levites, consecrated from birth to the service of God, are always in danger of thinking that the proper response to the dangers of materiality is to renounce it altogether. Therefore, it was necessary to engage them in this war in order that they learn to fully appreciate the value of the elements of creation on the lower rungs of spirituality.

The lesson for us here is that the extent to which we dedicate ourselves to spiritual pursuits should not cause us to disparage those “beneath” us. As the sages have instructed us, “Be humble before *all* men.”[26](#) Everything and everyone has some positive aspect for us to value and learn from, no matter how holy we may be or have become.[27](#)

The Torah goes into great detail about the booty of Midian and its purification in preparation for Jewish use and is quite terse about the details of the battle itself. This, again, is because the purpose of the war with Midian was not to conquer them or their land but to illustrate the proper attitude toward materiality.[28](#)

Inner Dimensions

[21] The fundamental difference between ritual defilement (*tumah*) and absorption of forbidden food is that the latter penetrates *into* the vessel, while the former resides spiritually *around* the vessel. Thus, a vessel that has absorbed forbidden food needs to be immersed in boiling water or heated until white-hot in order to make it physically release the forbidden food it has absorbed, while a vessel that has been defiled needs only to be immersed in a *mikveh*—whose waters merely surround the vessel from without and do not physically affect the walls of the vessel in any way.

Inasmuch as our sense of logic is tied largely to our physical senses, the process used to make a vessel give up the forbidden food it has absorbed seems more logical than the process used to purify a vessel from ritual defilement. It goes somewhat against the grain of logic to say that immersing a vessel in a specified volume of water originating from a specified source can somehow affect it.

Ritual defilement by contact with a corpse is even more abstract than regular ritual defilement, so the means used to purify it—sprinkling a few drops of a specially prepared solution on the outside of the affected person or vessel—are even more “spiritual” and counter logic even more.

This explains how Moses erred regarding the power of the solution of the ashes of the red cow: Moses was the “escort of the King” (God), and looked at reality from the higher, Divine perspective. Accordingly, he felt that the potency of the solution of the ashes of the red cow should be sufficient to penetrate the innermost aspects of the person or vessel: an overall change in a person’s attitude should by right affect all aspects of his or her life, down to the minutest details.

Eleazar, however, was the priest, the “escort of the Queen” (the people). He looked at reality from the earthly perspective, and therefore knew that sweeping, overall changes are not enough; the individual must work on his or her inner self directly, as well.[30](#)

Inner Dimensions

[41] “The villages of Yair”: When he renamed the villages, Yair called them *chavot* (instead of one of the more usual terms, *banot* or *kefarim*).

The basic reason for this is because the word *chavot* is related to the word for “life” (*chai*), indicating that he intended them to be a memorial to his life.

On a deeper level, however, this term expressed the spiritual transformation Yair intended for these villages to undergo. Idolatry, the antithesis of Divine consciousness, is equivalent to spiritual death: the idolater severs himself from God, the source of life. By including these villages in the Jewish national homeland, Yair was transforming them from domains of death to gardens of life.

Furthermore, the word *Yair* means “will shine,” so *Chavot Yair* means “Locales of life where Divine light will shine.”

The deeper reason why Yair renamed only the *villages* this way is because the culture of the village is less sophisticated than that of the city and thus represents a more raw, unrefined level of Divine consciousness. (We are contrasting the village with a well-run and enlightened city, not the degenerate hotbed of vice the term “city” has unfortunately come to connote in modern times.) Transforming the *village* into a Godly setting thus captures the essence of our Divine mission in this world—to transform even the aspects of reality that are furthest removed from Divinity into God’s home on earth.[35](#)