

## Parshas Matos Masei – Rabbi Jonathan Shooter (Reprinted)

ב מנחם אב תשע"ה – 17 July 2015 – שבת פ' מטות מסעי

There is an interesting request in this week's parashah. The tribes of Reuven and Gad asked Moshe for permission to separate from the rest of the tribes and settle on the other side of the Jordan River. Due to their abundance of cattle and livestock, they would require that region's vast lands to contain them. Moshe became angry, and compared their request to that of the mission of the spies, as they were discouraging the rest of Bnei Yisrael from entering the land of Israel. After some clarification, Moshe acceded to their request. Were the tribes of Reuven and Gad justified in asking to settle where they did, and if not, where did they err? In addition, why did it all end in disaster years later when they became the first tribes to go into exile?

Rav Aharon Kotler explains that the reasoning behind their request was correct. Yaakov Avinu had also settled in those lands across the Jordan in a place called Sukkos. This is seen in the verse which says that after his parting from Esav, "But Yaakov journeyed to Sukkos and built himself a house, and for his livestock he made shelters (sukkos); he therefore called the name of the place Sukkos" (Bereishis 33:17). Why does the Torah tell us that he made shelters for his animals, and furthermore, why was the place named after the booths that his flock dwelt in, rather than his own house? Chazal say regarding Avraham that every plot of land he walked on was given to him and his descendants afterwards. Yaakov also inherited this promise, and therefore journeyed to Sukkos to prepare that place for his descendants. This was achieved by building not only a house for himself, but also shelters for his livestock. By calling the place after the booths, he simultaneously prepared that place for the animals of his descendants. The tribes of Reuven and Gad were therefore claiming the inheritance from Yaakov; now they were coming with their abundance of animals and felt it was their right to dwell there. When the verse says, "The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had abundant livestock, very great" (Bemidbar 32:1), it places the tribe of Gad next to the words "abundant" and "very great." This is because they were the main initiators of the request, since they had the most livestock. This is alluded to in the rest of the narrative, where Gad is mentioned first, as they had the most interest in the request. In addition, in Sefer Yehoshua, it says that the place Sukkos was given specifically to the tribe of Gad. Because of their abundance of livestock as compared to Reuven, they merited that particular place. This was all because their ancestor Yaakov had paved the way.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin asks the following question. Following Moshe's response, in which he admonished them to put their trust in Hashem, the tribes of Reuven and Gad replied, "Your servants shall do as our master instructs" (Bemidbar 32:25). What was it Moshe had instructed? Surely he had only agreed to their request and set out the conditions. What was the specific thing they had to do? If we look at Moshe's response to their request, we find several major differences between what he said and the tribes' request. The tribes said, "We will arm ourselves swiftly for bnei Yisrael" (Bemidbar 32:17), without mentioning Hashem's Name. They continued confidently, "our children will dwell in fortified cities," implying that they could rely on the strength of their own hands without any Heavenly assistance. Moshe corrected them and said, "If you will arm yourselves before Hashem for the battle...and every armed man among you shall cross the Jordan before Hashem...and the land shall be conquered before Hashem" (Bemidbar 32:20-22). Moshe was teaching them that they would succeed only if they placed their trust in Hashem. They had to recognize that only if Hashem decides that an enterprise will be successful will success be achieved; otherwise, the use of all the effort and armies in the world will be futile. This explains why Moshe told them that they would "Build...cities for your small children" (Bemidbar 32:24), not mentioning that they would be "fortified," as the two tribes had suggested. With Hashem's help they could leave them as open, unwallled cities. Now we can understand their response, "Your servants shall do as my master instructs," i.e., we shall put our trust in Hashem only. "And your servants shall cross over, every armed person of the legion, before Hashem to do battle, as my Lord speaks" (Bemidbar 32:27). The tribes of Reuven and Gad had noted the rebuke of Moshe and had taken it to heart. Now that they realized the source of their strength and their reliance upon Hashem, they were ready to proceed.

There is another criticism of these two tribes found in the parashah. It says, "Pens for our flocks shall we build here for our livestock, and cities for our small children" (Bemidbar 32:16). The Midrash says that they were at fault in their request, in that they made the *ikar* (that which is primary) into *tafel* (that which is secondary), and they made that which is *tafel* into the *ikar*. This was because they placed their possessions before their bodies, worrying about their flocks before their people. The Midrash then applies the following verse to them: "If an inheritance is seized hastily in the beginning, its end will not be blessed" (Mishlei 20:21). Rav Shmuel Rozovsky makes an inference from the words of the above midrash. He says that they were at fault on two separate accounts. Not only did they make the *ikar* into *tafel*, they also made that which is of lesser importance into the main item. Rav Rozovsky continues that it actually follows that when a person has this distorted value system he will then proceed to relegate that which is of vital importance to that of negligible value. He is highlighting the importance of placing one's priorities in the correct order based on the Torah's outlook, and not following what the rest of the world dictates. Rabbeinu Bachaye explains the verse in Mishlei cited by the Midrash above, that if there is an inheritance that is not due to come to a person from Heaven, but rather he runs and grabs it, the outcome will be that it will not bring blessing. On the other hand, if an inheritance does come from Heaven, its outcome will result in blessing. He then cites the fact that there were two exceedingly wealthy men in the world, Korach and Haman. Both of them were destroyed together with their property. This was because their wealth was not decreed from on high; instead, they stole and extorted from others. The tribes of Reuven and Gad were exceedingly wealthy with their abundance of cattle, which, as mentioned, they held dearer to them than their own children. For this, Hashem said, "By your lives, you will not see a sign of blessing from this property." So it was that the venture of the tribes over the Jordan ended in tragedy when they were exiled prematurely, before the other tribes. Rabbeinu Bachaye then applies to them the verse "For neither from sunrise nor from sunset, nor from the wilderness comes greatness. For Hashem is the Judge; He lowers this one and raises that one" (Tehillim 75:7-8). This teaches us that it is not one's travels and ventures which raise a person and make him wealthy; rather, all is dependant on Hashem. He raises and He lowers, as those tribes tragically discovered years later.

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