

Parshas Matos – Gershon Hepner

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We read this week how the tribes of Reuven and Gad were blessed with immense wealth in the form of livestock. The blessing was both in terms of quantity and quality, and they made a business decision not to live in Eretz Yisroel. They approached Moshe for permission to remain on the eastern bank of the River Yarden, where the land was better suited to animal husbandry.

Moshe granted permission on condition they would provide military assistance in conquering Eretz Yisroel, and they readily agreed. It would appear that these tribes acted nobly in their polite request, and in their fulfilment to the letter of Moshe's conditions.

However, Chazal are critical of these two tribes who willingly forfeited their privilege of living in Eretz Yisroel, simply so that they could earn a better living. The Meforshim point out that centuries later, of all the tribes, these were the first to be exiled by Tiglas Pileser, king of Ashur [Divrei Hayomim I (5:26)]. This is viewed as a punishment for their choice to tend their flocks and herds in an ideal farming environment, rather than to live in Eretz Yisroel.

When Moshe acquiesced to their request, he apportioned the land to the tribes of Gad and Reuven *and to half the tribe of Menasheh* (32:33). Menasheh? Where does he come into the picture? Menasheh never requested land on the east bank of the Yarden, so why was land apportioned to him along with Reuven and Gad?

Ibn Ezra explains that a relatively insignificant number from the tribe of Menasheh had requested to live in Transjordan - in a similar manner to Reuven and Gad. Due to their small number (only two out of a total of eight Menasheh family groups), the name of Menasheh was not mentioned at the outset.

Ramban suggests that this area of Transjordan was so expansive, that there was sufficient living space to accommodate others besides Reuven and Gad. Moshe presented to the rest of Bnei Yisroel the opportunity to live on the east bank, and half of the tribe of Menasheh took up the offer.

Yalkut Me'am Loez quotes **Yalkut Reuveini** that the tribe of Menasheh was torn in two as a punishment for Menasheh's role in dealing with the brothers of Yosef. Menasheh was the emissary of Yosef to plant the royal goblet in Binyomin's luggage, and Menasheh was the man sent to bring the brothers back to Egypt to face this very charge. The brothers tore their clothes in anguish over their plight, and so Menasheh's tribe was "torn" between two territories, one inside Eretz Yisroel and one outside.

The **Ha'amek Dovor** (Devorim 3:16) suggests that Moshe selected Menasheh to live in Transjordan, to serve as a positive inspiration upon the tribes of Reuven and Gad. Menasheh would teach Torah to them, and help them to maintain their *ruchniyus* links with Eretz Yisroel, despite their geographical separation from the rest of Bnei Yisroel and Kedushas Ho'Oretz.

Other Meforshim note that Menasheh would serve as the perfect influence upon Reuven and Gad. Being in the company of a tribe descended from Yosef, would be a constant reminder to Reuven and Gad that irrespective of where we live, Eretz Yisroel is the centre of our lives. Yosef had insisted that his ultimate burial place be Eretz Yisroel, and his descendants, the daughters of Tzelofchod from the tribe of Menasheh itself, shared that self-same love of Eretz Yisroel. The presence of the tribe of Menasheh among the peoples of Reuven and Gad would be an ongoing prompt to them as to where their interests should lie.

In a similar vein, **Rabbi Cooper zt"l** commented on the Halochah that Yovel only applies when all of Bnei Yisroel are resident in Eretz Yisroel. The Gemorah's expression is

"BiZ'man She'Kol Yoshveho Oleho"

"at a time when its residents are upon it (the land)" (Arochin 32b)

Rabbi Cooper zt"l asked that this expression is surely tautological? If a person is to be regarded as a 'resident', then by definition he must also be 'on it'?

Rabbi Cooper zt"l explained that if a Jew keeps Eretz Yisroel at the forefront of his mind, davens for the safety of the land, and is concerned for the welfare of its residents, then he is considered a 'Yoshev Eretz Yisroel', an inhabitant of the land, wherever he may physically be. One can be a virtual resident of Eretz Yisroel, without actually being there, simply by allowing it to take centre stage in your heart and mind.

Menasheh is then the ideal example to the tribes of Reuven and Gad. These tribes, who put their *gashmiyus parnossoh* before their *ruchniyus* environs, became neighbours of Menasheh, the tribe to whom Eretz Yisroel meant so much.

In gratitude to Hashem Yisborach for the safe arrival of our grandson in Eretz Yisroel, born last Friday, 13 Tammuz 5774