

**PARSHAT MATOT / MASEI**

**PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'**

**WHAT WAS "AL PI HASHEM"?**

1. Review 33:1-2, noting how these psukim introduce the listing of all of Bnei Yisrael's journeys through the desert.

Then, read once again the first half of 33:2, noting the phrase "al pi Hashem", and what it modifies.

In your opinion, does this mean that God instructed Moshe to write this list, or that each of these journeys began with God's instruction? What would be the logic of each interpretation?

In your answer, relate to Bamidbar 9:15-23!

Now, see Ibn Ezra & Ramban on 33:2, noting how and why each "parshan" offers a different explanation.

**THE 'HOLY' WAR AGAINST MIDYAN**

1. In your opinion, why do think that specifically Pinchas was chosen to lead the battle against the Midyanites, and not Yehoshua - who had earlier led the battle against Amalek, or Moshe Rabeinu himself - who had earlier led the battle against Sichon?

Relate your answer to both WHO Bnei Yisrael are fighting, and WHY Bnei Yisrael are fighting?

[Would you suspect that Moshe Rabeinu's family relationship with Midyan may have affected God's considerations?]

2. Review 31:5-6. Based on these psukim, is it clear that Pinchas is sent to lead the nation in battle? If not, why is he being sent? Relate your answer to the purpose of this battle, and to Devarim 20:1-9.

3. Based on 31:35, we have an approx. population figure for the female children of Midyan (i.e. 32,000). Accordingly, approximate how many adult males would there be in Midyan, and hence – the approximate potential size of Midyan's army?

Considering that Bnei Yisrael's army had a potential of 600,000 soldiers (see 26:50-53), what logical reason is there for God's specific commandment to send only 12,000 men into battle (i.e. one thousand for each tribe). [Relate this observation to your answers to the above questions.]

4. See Ramban on 31:6, in regard to why only 12,000 men were sent to fight that battle (and not the entire army).

See also Ibn Ezra on 31:8, and relate his commentary to our shiur on Parshat Balak.

5. Following the battle, how was the booty split between the people and the soldiers? Note the percentage of the booty that was given to God from each group, i.e. both from Bnei Yisrael and from the soldiers who fought. Can you explain why?

[In your answer, relate to 31:28 & 31:47!]

What is the logic of these percentages?

6. Note the phrase "chukat ha'torah" in 31:21-24. What does this phrase mean and what does it relate to? In your answer, relate to the meaning of these words as explained in our shiur on Parshat Chukat [re: Parshat Para/ Bamidbar chapter 19].

In these four psukim, can you identify a specific set of "chukim" (laws that are set and don't change), as well as a "torah" - i.e. a procedural type law?

Note as well the phrase "chukat mishpat" in last week's Parsha (see Bamidbar 27:11, in reference to 27:6-11). Note there as well what is considered a "mishpat" (resolving a dispute through the court system) and what is a "chok" (a set law that doesn't change)!

**THE TWO & A HALF TRIBES**

1. Based on the opening pasuk of the story of Bnei Gad & Reuven (see 32:1), attempt to explain why this story follows immediately after the story of the war against Midyan (i.e. chapter 31).

[In your answer, be sure to relate to 31:32.]

In your opinion, is there a more 'appropriate' location (either chronological or thematic) for this chapter in Sefer Bamidbar? If so, explain where; and why you think the Torah preferred to record it here instead.

2. Review 34:16-29. Attempt to give a title to this parshia, and explain how it relates to the parshiot which precede it and follow it.

In what way is the parshia similar to the opening parshia concerning the "meraglim" in the beginning of Parshat Shlach (see 13:1-18)? In what manner is it different?

Which tribes are missing from the list in 34:16-29!?

Can you explain why?

[The answer is very simple!]

Next, review those psukim carefully once again, noting which tribal leaders are NOT referred to as NASI.

Can you explain why? [The answer is very difficult, and if do find one, please tell me!]

**TWELVE TRIBES & SHEVET LEVI**

1. Can you explain the logic of Am Yisrael having twelve independent tribes? Considering that we all serve the same God, would it not have been better for Am Yisrael to be simply one united nation, i.e. without the institution of tribes at all? [Would this not enhance the unity of Am Yisrael?]

If you do find value to this concept of 12 tribes, attempt to relate it to the overall purpose of Am Yisrael to become a model nation before all nations.

Can your answer help explain why in Sefer Bamidbar we find so many topics that relate to the TWELVE tribes and their leaders? [including Parshat Matot itself!]

2. What is the purpose of separating the tribe of Levi? Is their sole responsibility simply to work in the Mishkan/ Mikdash?

If so, why are their cities scattered among all twelve tribes (see 35:1-8). If not, what else are they supposed to do all day?

In your answer, relate to Devarim 17:8-11, 33:8-11 & Bamidbar 3:5-13.

How are the Leviim supposed to support themselves if they only have cities, but no land to cultivate?

In your answer, relate to Bamidbar 18:21-32. Read that section carefully, noting especially 18:21, 18:24, & 18:31.

3. In relation to the above questions, see Rambam - Mishne Torah, the very end of Hilchot Shmita & Yovel (13:12-13). In your opinion, what was the Rambam's source for these halachot?

**PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)**

1. To the best of recollection, what are the precise geographical borders of the Land of Israel? Can you quote a source for your answer?

When God promised the land to Avraham Avinu, did he tell him the borders at that time?

[Note Breishit 15:18-20 & 17:7-8.]

2. In Parshat Masei (see 34:1-15), the Torah records the precise borders of Eretz Canaan. In your opinion, is the phrase "eretz canaan" simply a synonym for "eretz yisrael" [the Land of Israel]? [If you answered no, explain what the difference is, and what you based your answer on.]

Review 34:1-15, taking special note of the eastern border.

Does it include the eastern bank of the Jordan River [i.e. Transjordan]?

If not, can you explain why?

3. Recall from Parshat Matot (chapter 32) that Moshe had agreed to grant Transjordan as the official inheritance of Gad and Reuven (on the condition that they first help in the conquest of Eretz Canaan). If

indeed this area is outside the above mentioned borders of Eretz Canaan, why did Moshe allow this decision?

In other words, if Transjordan is part of the holyland, then it should be within the official borders! If not, how can it be considered an inheritance of one of the tribes?

4. Based on the borders described in 34:1-15, is the Negev part of the Land of Israel? If so, which part of it? [Would this include areas such as Eilat?]

If the entire Negev is part of Eretz Canaan, why do Bnei Yisrael pass through that area during their journey through the desert?

5. Review 32:5-15, noting how Moshe compares Bnei Gad & Reuven's request to the sin of the "meraglim". Nonetheless, after their quick explanation, he agrees to their demands.

In your opinion, what caused Moshe's change in attitude?

In Bnei Gad & Reuven's response to Moshe, do they relate in any manner to Moshe's initial accusation? If so, how?

Why is the offer of Gad & Reuven to serve as the "chalutz" [front line troops] in the military campaign to conquer the Land so important to Moshe? In your answer, relate to Bnei Yisrael's fear of attacking 'walled cities' (see Devarim 1:26-28) and how their offer could help quell that fear.

6. To the best of your recollection, is there any other source in Chumash that relates to the actual borders of the land of Israel? If so, how do those borders compare to the borders described in Parshat Masei? [See Breishit 10:19.]

7. Scan thru Sefer Breishit noting the various instances when God promises the 'Promised Land' to the Avot. [To save you some time, see Breishit 12:7, 13:14-17, 15:18, 17:7-8, 22:17-18, 26:2-5, 28:3-4, 28:13-14, 35:11-12, 46:1-4, 48:4 & 21. See as well Shmot 23:28-3.]

From these sources, can you pinpoint the precise borders?

[See also Breishit 10:15-19 in relation to 17:7-8.]

Do any of these borders contradict one another?

Be sure to relate to Breishit 15:18-20 [Brit Bein Ha'btarim] in comparison to Breishit 17:7-8 [Brit Milah].

8. When one says that the Promised Land is HOLY, what does this imply? Does this statement relate to the realm of "halacha"?

If so, how? [Bring examples of any "halachot" that this "kedusha" (holiness) relates to?

Is this concept of "kedusha" found in any other realm of Judaism? If so, can you explain how it is similar (or different)?

9. Are you aware of any laws relating to the "kedusha" of the Land of Israel that depend on who is sovereign in the Land?

If so, what are they?

10. Finally, see Rambam Hilchot Trumot 1:1-5. See also 1:26.

As you study this Ramban, note how he provides a 'political' definition of the land of Israel (and not a geographical one)!

Based on the above questions, can you explain the reason for this presentation?

Note how the Rambam does relate to "eretz canaan", as well as to the land the God had promised to Avraham Avinu. Attempt to explain how and why Rambam reaches his conclusions concerning the 'expandable' borders of the land. Does it appear as though he gives a 'limit' to this potential expansion?

According to this Ramban, what would be the halachic status today of the land under the sovereignty of the State of Israel?

### PART III - PARSHANUT

#### THE FIRST PASUK OF PARSHAT MATOT

1. Read the opening pasuk in Parshat Matot (30:2). As you study this pasuk, make note of whatever problems that you would assume that the classic commentators would deal with. List them, but don't look at the commentators (yet).

2. This opening pasuk (30:2) introduces a set of laws. How is it different than most other 'introductory psukim' that we find in Chumash?

3. Before we continue, note that the division of the Bible according to chapters (a non-jewish tradition) begins this chapter with the final pasuk of Parshat Pinchas! [See 30:1]

Note how the division according to "parshiot" (a Jewish tradition) clearly contradicts the chapter division, as the new 'parshia' begins in 30:2, and not in 30:1!

According to simple "pshat", which division is correct?

Can you think of any reason at all why this chapter should begin in 30:1? How does this pasuk (30:1) relate to chapter 29?

Use 28:2 (in relation to 30:1) to prove that Chazal are correct!

In your opinion, could this 'mistake' in the division of chapters relate to the problem raised in the above question?

4. This set of laws (of "nedarim" [vows]) is unique for it was given specifically to the tribal leaders [you should have noted this in question #1].

In your opinion, were these laws given ONLY to the tribal leaders (and not to the people)?

If so, why shouldn't the people know these laws?

If not, i.e. the laws were intended for everyone, why are they first being given to the tribal leaders?

5. See Rashi on 30:2. How does he answer this question?

There are two stages in Rashi's answer, explain each stage.

Note how Rashi refers to Shmot 34:31-32.

To appreciate this Rashi, review Shmot 34:27-35, and attempt to determine which specific mitzvot Moshe conveyed to Bnei Yisrael when he came down from Har Sinai with the second luchot. [See commentators there as well.]

Why are those psukim the key source for Rashi's interpretation?

6. Now, see Ramban on 30:2. How does he answer this question?

In what manner is his approach totally different than Rashi's?

7. Many commentators raise a more basic problem, i.e. what are the laws of nedarim (vows) doing here (at this point in Sefer Bamidbar) at all?

Before you study the commentators, attempt to answer the following questions:

1) In what manner do the laws of nedarim relate to the preceding set of laws regarding the T'midim u'Musafim (i.e. chapters 28-29)? Note the concluding psukim of that unit!

2) How do the laws of nedarim relate to the topics that follow, i.e. the war against Midyan & and the two & a half tribes? [Do any of those stories contain vows?]

See Rashbam on 30:2. How does he answer this question?

Does he relate to any other questions regarding 30:2?

If so, what is his answer?

8. See Ibn Ezra on 30:2.

How would the Ibn Ezra answer the above question?

Note that Ibn Ezra's interpretation implies that these laws of nedarim were FIRST given to Bnei Yisrael at this time (i.e. during the 40th year in the desert, after the war against Midyan).!

What is problematic about this opinion, and explain why others would most probably disagree?

If Ibn Ezra is correct, why aren't these laws recorded immediately after the story in chapter 32?

How does he deal with this problem in his commentary?

[See also Chizkuni on 30:2.]

9. See Seforno on 30:2. How does Seforno connect these laws of nedarim to the mitzvot that were given on Har Sinai?

Would Seforno agree with Ibn Ezra in regard to when these laws were first given?

10. Next, carefully study 30:17. Which of the above opinions does this pasuk support?

Which commentary does it appear to contradict?

11. The phrase "zeh ha'davar" is found several other times in Chumash, in relation to the:

manna - see Shmot 16:16,32;

Mishkan - see Shmot 35:4.

Miluiim ceremony - see Vayikra 8:5 ;

Yom Ha'Shmuni - see Vayikra 9:6 ;

"shchutei chutz" - see Vayikra 17:2.

[See also Bamidbar 36:6]

Which of these instances is preceded by God instructing Moshe beforehand (and which cases are not)?

Now, carefully read the opening ten lines of Ramban's commentary to 30:2. Why do you think that he compare our pasuk (30:2) specifically to Vayikra 17:2, and not to the others?

How does he relate to all of the other cases mentioned above?

[As you read this Ramban, note how thorough and concise his commentary is!]

### HOW TO DIVIDE THE LAND?

1. God's command to Bnei Yisrael concerning how to apportion the land appears to contain an internal contradiction. On the one hand, it states:

"You shall APPORTION the land among yourselves... with larger groups INCREASE the share, with smaller groups REDUCE the share... (see Bamidbar 26:54-55)

This implies that the basis for apportioning the land was the size of each tribe and/or family.

Yet, the next pasuk seems to imply exactly the opposite:

"Each portion shall be assigned by LOT, whether for larger or smaller groups" (see 26:56)

In Parshat Masei, this ambiguous command is repeated, but in shorter form:

"You shall apportion the land by LOTS, clan by clan: with LARGER groups increase the share, with SMALLER groups reduce the share. Wherever the LOT FALLS for anyone - that shall be his... (see 33:54)

Based on these psukim, how do you think the land is supposed to be apportioned?

Can you resolve the apparent contradictions?

In your answer, attempt to differentiate between the geographical area which each tribe is to receive, and how that area will be apportioned internally by each tribe according to family clans.

During the time of Yehoshua, how was the land actually divided according to tribes; based on the population of each tribe, or based on pre-set parcels of land? In your answer, relate to Yehoshua chapter 18.

After you arrive at your conclusion (or if you give up), see Ramban on 26:54 (it's complicated, but worthwhile if you prepared). [See also Rashi & Sforno.]

[The Ramban is very long, but his basic point can be understood from the first 10 or 15 lines. This topic is also discussed at length in Baba Batra 117b.]

b'hatzlacha,  
menachem