

*Parashat Matot* begins with the laws of *Nedarim* / vows to prohibit items or actions that otherwise are permitted by the Torah--for example, a vow not to eat a specific permitted food or not to interact with a specific person. R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: The *Mitzvot* in general, especially those which are obligations toward *Hashem* alone (as opposed to interpersonal obligations) are intended to achieve specific results: to draw a person closer to *Hashem*, and to sanctify one's deeds, thoughts, and beliefs. The Torah's goal is to accomplish these aims within the framework of everyday life; therefore, the Torah is not too heavy-handed in its demands.

R' Kook continues: The Torah aims to address the spiritual needs of every individual, but, when all is said and done, it is directed toward the nation as a whole, and it therefore speaks generally. Even so, G-d forbid that any person take upon himself to breach the Torah's boundaries, even if he thinks that his personal spirituality will benefit thereby. The Torah's demands do not change because of the feelings of an individual or even a group. In areas where the Torah's demands are well-established, no individual or group may say that his or her spiritual needs require a different law.

Having said that, R' Kook writes, the Torah does provide a mechanism for addressing a person's personal spiritual needs, and that is through *Nedarim*. If a person feels that he will benefit spiritually from behaving in a more holy way or distancing himself from pleasures more than the Torah requires, the Torah gives him a process for doing so--i.e., by taking a vow to refrain from some object, act, or behavior. (*Ain Ayah: Shabbat 1:37*)

## Tefilah

*This year, we will iy"H devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified by the Midrash Rabbah and Midrash Yalkut Shimoni.*

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: "**Rinah**" is prayer in the form of praise and thanksgiving. *Midrash Rabbah* teaches that one should incorporate *Rinah* into his requests from *Hashem*. The *Gemara* (*Berachot 32a*) teaches, more specifically, that one must praise *Hashem* before making requests. This praise is the function of the first three *Berachot* of *Shemoneh Esrei*, while the next thirteen blessings constitute our requests.

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204) writes that praising *Hashem* is an integral part of the *Mitzvah* of prayer--a *Mitzvah* derived from the verse (*Shmot 23:25*), "You shall serve *Hashem*, your *Elokim*." Via the Oral Law we know that this "*Avodah*" / "service" is prayer. Likewise, it says (*Devarim 11:13*), "To serve Him with all your heart," to which our Sages comment: "What service is in the heart? This is prayer." [Until here from *Rambam*]

R' Pincus explains: As *Rambam* indicates, the Torah calls prayer "*Avodah*" / "service." In order for one's requests to be "*Avodah*," one must recognize *Hashem's* Divinity and Loftiness and must negate himself before Him. If one does not know before Whom he is praying, or if he does not take to heart the fact that he is praying to G-d, his prayer cannot be called "*Avodah*." Therefore, only after one has praised *Hashem* and has reflected on His Divinity--only if one grasps that *Hashem* is not just another force in the universe--does his request become "*Avodah*." Without first praising *Hashem*, a person's words might still constitute "prayer," but he has not fulfilled the requirement of *Avodah*, which is an integral part of the *Mitzvah*.

R' Pincus continues: We are commanded to serve *Hashem* with joy. If you see someone finding a bag that you know is full of gold coins, but you see that the finder doesn't smile, you know that he is unaware of the sack's contents. Likewise, if one does not feel joy when he prays, then it is clear that he does not understand that he is praying to the Incomparable, All-Powerful G-d. By praising *Hashem*, one educates himself so that he can pray joyously.

(*She'arim B'tefilah* p.47)

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on the *yahrzeit* of his father, Alexander Isaac ben Zev Wolf a"h

**“These are the journeys of *Bnei Yisrael* . . .” (33:1)**

On the verse (*Vayikra* 6:6), “An eternal flame shall burn on the altar, it shall not be extinguished,” the *Talmud Yerushalmi* comments: “Even during the travels.” What does this teach us?

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (the “*Reisha Rav*”; killed in the Holocaust in 1941) writes: There is an awesome ethical lesson here. When a person is at home, he is less likely to sin. Even if the *Yetzer Ha'ra* tempts him, he will overcome the *Yetzer Ha'ra* because he knows that whatever he does will come to the attention of his friends and neighbors. Not so when a person is traveling. When he is away, he can act with impunity and it will not become known at home. This fact is alluded to in the verse (*Bereishit* 4:7), “Sin lurks at the door.” When one leaves the door of his house, he is more likely to sin.

However, “Fortunate is one who fears *Hashem*, who goes in his ways” (*Tehilim* 128:1). Even when he goes on his way, he fears *Hashem*. [Note that most commentaries translate: “His ways,” referring to G-d.]

This, writes R' Lewin, is the *Yerushalmi*'s message: The eternal flame of love of G-d should burn on the altar in a person's heart even when he travels. As *Tehilim* (119:1) says, “Fortunate are those who are perfect on the road, who go with G-d's Torah.” (*Ha'drash V'Ha'iyun* II p.91)



**“Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of *Hashem* . . .” (33:2)**

R' Avraham Dov Ber z"l (1760-1840; *Chassidic Rebbe* and rabbi of Ovruch, Ukraine; later in Tzefat) writes: The Torah intends that we learn a practical lesson from the description of *Bnei Yisrael*'s travels. He explains:

The primary purpose of being in *Eretz Yisrael* is to attain *Yir'at Ha'romemut* / awe of the Creator, the King of Kings, the Holy One blessed is He. Since that is where the primary revelation of His *Shechinah* takes place, that is where a person can easily accept the yoke of His dominion, on the one hand, and attain humility, on the other hand.

The purpose of *Bnei Yisrael*'s travels through the desolate wilderness, a place of snakes, serpents and scorpions (*Devarim* 8:15), was so that they could appreciate that there is another type of *Yir'ah*, i.e., fear of physical things. They needed to know--as do we, hence we read of their travels--that such *Yir'ah* exists, even though it is not the ideal form of *Yir'ah*. *Yir'at Ha'romemut* / awe of G-d is the ideal, while *Yir'ah* / simple fear can be a stepping-stone to that higher level. Ultimately, though, one should fear nothing but *Hashem*. (*Bat Ayin*)

**“*Hashem* spoke to Moshe, saying, “Take vengeance for *Bnei Yisrael* against the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people.” Moshe spoke to the people, saying, ‘Arm men from among yourselves for the legion that they may act against Midian to inflict *Hashem*'s vengeance against Midian.’” (31:2-3)**

*Rashi* z"l writes: The expression Moshe used, “*Hashem*'s vengeance,” is equivalent to the expression *Hashem* employed, “Vengeance for *Bnei Yisrael*,” because, if one attacks *Yisrael*, it is as though he has attacked the Holy One, blessed is He. [Until here from *Rashi*]

It emerges, observes R' Yosef Tendler z"l (1932-2012; *Menahel* of Mechinas Ner Israel in Baltimore, Maryland), that vengeance for *Hashem* and vengeance for *Bnei Yisrael* are one and the same.

R' Tendler continues in the name of R' Avraham Yaakov Pam z"l (1913-2001; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath in Brooklyn, N.Y.): We recite in the *Al Ha'nissim* prayer on *Chanukah*, “You, in Your great mercy, fought their fight.” Why was the war against the Greeks the Jewish People's fight? After all, the Greeks did not seek to destroy the Jewish People, only the Jewish religion! It should have been *Hashem*'s fight! R' Pam explains: The Jewish People of that time understood that a life without Torah is not worth living; therefore, the Greeks' attack on the Torah was an attack on the Jewish People. It was our fight.

R' Tendler adds: We read in *Tehilim* (1:2), “But his desire is in the Torah of *Hashem*, and in His Torah he meditates day and night.” The *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 32b) notes that the phrase, “His Torah”--referring to *Hashem*'s Torah--also can be read, “his Torah”--man's Torah. Says the *Gemara*: “First it is ‘the Torah of *Hashem*,’ then it becomes ‘his Torah’--the Torah of the person who studies it. When we study Torah properly, we will come to feel that an attack on the Torah is an attack on our Torah and, therefore, an attack on us. (*Od Yosef Chai*)

This week, the month of *Tammuz* ends, and the month of *Av* begins. R' Chaim Kanievski *shlita* (Bnei Brak, Israel) writes: “*Tammuz*” is the name of an idol (see *Yechezkel* 8:14). Our Sages gave the month this name because, on the seventeenth of the month, an idol was placed in the *Heichal* / sanctuary of the *Bet Hamikdash*. [This is one of the five reasons we fast on the 17<sup>th</sup> of *Tammuz* (see *Ta'anit* 26b).]

The word “*Av*”--literally, “father”--connotes “consolation,” as in *Eichah* (5:3), “We have become orphans, with no ‘*Av*,’” alluding to the fact that it is parents who console their children, as we read (*Yeshayah* 66:13), “Like a man whose mother consoles him.”

(*Si'ach Ha'nechamah*)