

In this week's *Parashah*, *Hashem* commands Moshe (31:2), "Take vengeance for *Bnei Yisrael* against the Midianites." But Moshe doesn't go; instead (31:6), "Moshe sent them--a thousand from each tribe for the legion--them and Pinchas son of Elazar the Kohen."

R' Moshe Shlomo Kasher z"l (1914-1984; author and editor of Torah publications; member of the editorial board of *Encyclopedia Talmudit* and his father's *Torah Sheleimah*) writes: The worth of a person's actions cannot be properly measured by the actions themselves; only by how much of himself the doer put into them. There are some actions that seem insignificant, but in the Torah's eyes they are great, and vice-versa. How one welcomes guests is an example of this.

Our Sages teach that when *Hashem* told Moshe to go take *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt, Moshe argued, "Yitro opened his home to me and he treats me like a son. If one opens up for another, does the latter not owe the former his life? I cannot go without Yitro's permission!" The Torah knows, explains R' Kasher, that one who opens up his home is not merely opening a physical door; he is opening his heart and his soul. Therefore, the beneficiary owes the giver his own soul. This explains why our Sages say that *Hachnassat Orchim* / taking in guests is greater than receiving the *Shechinah*, for by opening one's heart and soul to another, one rises to a much higher spiritual level.

R' Kasher concludes: This explains, as well, why Moshe was unable to personally go into battle against Midian, the land that had welcomed him when he fled from Pharaoh. (*Hegyonot*)

Shabbat

R' Yaakov Meir Schechter *shlita* (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Sha'ar Ha'shamayim in Yerushalayim and a leader of Breslov *Chassidim*) writes: Singing *Zemirot* is one of the basic ways that a person interacts with his Creator. It is not for naught that R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (1698-1760; founder of the *Chassidic* movement) encouraged his followers to sing together with great devotion. By sitting together on *Shabbat* or at another *Mitzvah* occasion and singing songs that awaken a person to cling to *Hashem*, one fulfills the *Mitzvah* (*Devarim* 4:4), "You who cling to *Hashem*, your *Elokim*--you are all alive today." The *Mitzvah* (*Devarim* 11:22), "To cling to Him," also can be acquired through a *Niggun* / tune.



It is a remarkable thing, R' Schechter writes, that so many of our songs about *Hashem's* goodness to the Jewish People mention the downfall of our enemies. *Az Yashir* / the Song at the Sea (*Shmot* 15:1-19) is full of such references, as is the Song of Devorah (*Shoftim* ch.5). The *Shabbat Zemirot*, too, are full of references to taking vengeance on enemies. Indeed, the word "*Zemer*," besides meaning a "tune," also means "to cut" or "to prune," implying the cutting away of bad growths. Why?

R' Schechter explains: When do holy people feel joy and want to sing? When impurity is either eradicated or "sweetened" (*i.e.*, converted into something positive). As long as the opposite of holiness exists in the world, pain and suffering will exist as well, until such time as (*Zechariah* 13:2), "The spirit of impurity I will remove from the land" [in the time of *Mashiach*].



R' Schechter adds: R' Eliyahu z"l (1720-1797; the *Vilna Gaon*) is quoted by one of his students as saying that Moshe Rabbeinu brought several *Niggunim* / tunes with him from *Har Sinai*. The *Vilna Gaon* also said, "If our souls are crushed by suffering, we will revitalize ourselves through song."

(*Yom Machamadim* p.119-121)

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"These are the journeys of *Bnei Yisrael*, who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions, in the hand of Moshe and Aharon." (33:1)

R' Yehoshua Heschel (Harry) Kaufman *shlita* (rabbi in Washington, D.C., and Montreal) writes: One needs to know that the Torah is not a history book. Rather, the Torah teaches us how to learn and understand history from the proper perspective. The Jewish People do not live in the past as our detractors say; we live with the past.

R' Kaufman continues: Commentaries note that the first four words of our verse, "*Eleh masei Bnei Yisrael*," have the same initials as the names of the Four Exiles/oppressors that the Jewish People have endured--Edom (Rome), Madai (Media/Persia), Bavel (Babylon), and Yavan (Greece). Thus, our verse is teaching that we must view all of these exiles "in the hand of Moshe and Aharon," *i.e.*, through the lens of the Torah, which was given to us by Moshe and Aharon. (Ohr Yehoshua)

"And one *Nasi* / leader, one *Nasi*, from each tribe you shall take to divide the Land. These are the names of the men: for the tribe of Yehuda, Calev son of Yefuneh. And for the tribe of Shimon, Shmuel son of Amihud. For the tribe of Binyamin, Elidad son of Kislon. And for the tribe of the children of Dan, as *Nasi*, Buki son of Yogli." (34:18-22)

R' Chaim ben Attar *z"l* (1696-1743; Morocco, Italy and *Eretz Yisrael*) asks: Why is the title "*Nasi*" used in connection with the leader of Dan and all the other tribes (in verses 23-28), but not in connection with the leaders of Yehuda, Shimon, and Binyamin?

He answers: Perhaps the leaders of Yehuda, Shimon, and Binyamin are mentioned close enough to the phrase "one *Nasi*, one *Nasi*" that it is not necessary to repeat that each of them was a *Nasi*. Beginning with the fourth one, however, the memory of the word "*Nasi*" has already begun to fade, so it is repeated.

He continues: I saw in the name of R' Nissim Gaon *z"l* (990-1062; *Rosh Yeshiva* in Kairouan, Tunisia) that it is not necessary to mention "*Nasi*" in connection with Yehuda, because Calev is well-known. "*Nasi*" is not mentioned in connection with the tribe of Shimon, because that tribe was not worthy of honor after the sin of Zimri. Lastly, Elidad, the leader of Binyamin, was none other than Eldad (*Bemidbar* 11:27). Since he had attained prophecy, it would be degrading to call him a "mere" *Nasi*.

(Ohr Ha'Chaim)

R' Hersh Mendlowitz *shlita* (Silver Spring, Maryland, and Yerushalayim) writes: Perhaps "*Nasi*" is not mentioned in connection with Yehuda because its leader, Calev, has a more honorable title (*Bemidbar* 14:24), "My servant, Calev." (Ha'noten Imrei Shefer)

"Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of *Bnei Yisrael*, saying, 'This is the thing that *Hashem* has commanded: If a man takes a vow to *Hashem* or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth he shall do'." (30:2-3)

Rashi z"l writes: By stating that the laws about vows were taught first to the heads of the tribes, the Torah is teaching that the annulling of vows may be done by one person who is expert in the Law. [Until here from *Rashi*]

In *Sefer Shoftim*, we read that Yiftach made a vow (*Shoftim* 11:30-31), "If You will deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, then whatever emerges from the doors of my house to greet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall be for *Hashem*, and I will offer it as an *Olah*-offering." Yiftach expected, of course, that the first living thing he would encounter when he returned from battle would be an animal that was fit for a sacrifice, such as a bull, sheep, or goat. Instead, however (11:34), "Yiftach arrived at Mitzpah, to his home, and behold! his daughter was coming out toward him with drums and dances . . ." Yiftach did not seek to annul his vow; instead, he fulfilled his vow by sending his daughter to live out the rest of her life in seclusion.

R' Levi ben Gershon *z"l* ("*Ralbag*"; 1288-1344) writes that the author of *Sefer Shoftim*--our Sages say he was the prophet Shmuel--had several goals in telling us about these events:

First, this teaches a person to conduct all his affairs with wisdom and calm deliberation so that he does not come to regret his actions. If Yiftach had deliberated calmly, for example, he would have included a condition in his vow: "If my daughter comes out to meet me, I will offer something else as a substitute."

Second, this teaches that a person who is asking *Hashem* to do something good for him should take a vow of some kind, in order to publicize the goodness that *Hashem* has done for him.

Third, this teaches that a person who took a vow must fulfill it, no matter how difficult it might be, just as Yiftach fulfilled his vow by setting aside his daughter to live a life completely devoted to *Hashem*.

Ralbag adds: One might wonder why Yiftach did not ask Pinchas, who was still alive, to annul his vow. Surely Pinchas qualified as a person expert in the Law! Perhaps, *Ralbag* writes, Yiftach himself, as well as his cohort, did not know that annulling vows was possible. This is plausible because the Jewish People in those days had abandoned the Torah and were deeply immersed in the ways of the surrounding nations.

Why didn't Pinchas approach Yiftach and offer to annul his vow? *Ralbag* explains: A vow can only be annulled if the person who took the vow expresses regret for taking the vow and asks that it be annulled. Because this vow was taken so publicly and it contributed to a great miracle happening, perhaps it would not have been proper for Yiftach to regret taking it.

(Ha'to'aliyot, *Sefer Shoftim*, following ch. 16, #5, 6, 7)