

Mattos – Rabbi Yosef Serebryanski

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“DISS”-ing vows

Mankind has created a way of life from which it does not know how to extricate itself. The past continues to affect us, the possibilities of the future continue to drag us into fiction, and the present is filled with misperception.

We deal with our relationships as if the past exists in the present even though it is no longer relevant. We decide things based on a future that may or may not eventuate. Generally, in the present, we often do not know how to simply focus and listen, so that we may detect what we must do in order to operate in a balanced manner.

The Torah reflects the impact of past and future in our daily life. Many times the Torah combines them. One example is Numbers chapter 30 where the Torah uses the future, past and present tenses: as well as the languages of both singular and plural when discussing one issue. The issue is relationship of man to wife or father to daughter in regard to justifying or nullifying vows. This reflects what happens when there are disagreements in relationships. The past and future all become entangled in the present. This is also descriptive of what is currently being experienced by the present difficulties experienced by many of us.

Our very existence is the result of a combination of past lives, future purpose and our present connection with the source of life. Our present experiences are a preparation for the future. It is a confusing collection of difficulties that cleanse our past errors and insufficiencies as we utilize the present to propel us to our future.

The cleansing process itself often drains a person, making it challenging to deal with present events.

Major energy shifts are constantly occurring as the world prepares for what may be a devastating war or a new paradigm shift to instantly remove all of the world's destructive forces. It would appear to be the case that in order to generate clarity, a boundary was put in place to initiate the separation of opposite movements. As a result, the lower vibrations will cease to exist. At a precise moment there will be instantaneous peace for all of existence.

Numbers 30:2 **“And Moses spoke with the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel saying, this is the matter that YHVH commanded. A man when he vows a vow...”** One obvious question is that the verse could have used one simple word to say the leaders of the tribes “Hanesim.” Why does the verse use four Hebrew words; heads (of the) tribes (of the) children (of) Israel? In fact, most of the verse can be skipped just by writing: Moses said, a man when he vows...

One possible response is alluded to with the verse in Ecclesiastes 5:4 **“Better (or good, “tov” in Hebrew) that you do not vow than to vow and not pay (fulfill it).”** The Talmud (Shabbos 32b) states that a person has to be careful with vows since they have a potential to cause a death in the family.

This is alluded to in the Hebrew word that is used here; “Matos” tribes. When the middle letter “tes” (sounds like t) is removed the word then reads “mos” or “moh-ves” which means “death.” Thus, the verse in Ecclesiastes gives “good” advice. “Tov-good” begins with the letter tes which when (in Numbers 30:2) it is added into the word “mos” it then reads as “mattos.” Instead of life simply being a long road to death the letter tes adds good to it.

We can also read the verse in Numbers in the following manner. **“And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes.”** What did he say to them? That when they speak to the children of Israel they should include the message that is in the word “mattos.”

The message of the word mattos in this chapter regards the issue of vows. In the stating of the vow, the person should direct the energy of the vow away from him/herself. By pointing away from oneself it redirects some of the repercussions

away from the person. In Hebrew it would mean instead of saying “harei olai” “I take upon myself” the term “harei zu” “this is” (Talmud Nedorim 10 and Chulin 2a.)

We see this verbatim as Moses told them to say “This.” When we personalize a vow we bring the consequences into our personal space. We are specifically cautioned against attaching our personal identity of a vow. Even in taking the Jewish marriage vow we say harei at - you are, the object of the holiness. This teaches us that the issue of taking a vow is one of serious concern and one should carefully consider that concern before undertaking to do so. It actually teaches us that a vow is something to stay away from if at all possible.

“**This**” also means do not add your own words. It is one of the places that Moses told the leaders to say exactly what YHVH commanded.

The book **Aron Eidus** comments on Palms 24:4 “Asher lo noso lashov nafshi.” “Whose heart cannot bear (carry) any falsehood.” The letters of the word noso is comprised of the first letter of the three words that mean vow in Hebrew; noon for neder, shin for shvuah and alef for issar. The numeric value of these three words is 892 which is the same as four times “ze hadovor” “this is the matter” which Moses said. Ze hadovor is the verbage describing the issue of vows.

We are faced daily with a multitude of extraneous challenges. We have the option of acting upon those challenges or leaving them for another person or an alternative time or space. It is difficult enough for us to decide whether or not to further complicate our daily existence by taking on additional tasks not already required of us. Thus, if we wish to attempt something, LET US NOT SWEAR TO DO IT.

Life changes in each moment. That which was surely a given in the last minute may be totally uncertain or unattainable in the next. Take each challenge into each coming moment, knowing that changing conditions alter your abilities. Most importantly, know that your accomplishments come from only one place. If you truly accept that, you know that YOUR investment is that which emanates from the heart, NOT from a VOW. The rest of the ingredients for success are not up to you!

We all need to put the good back into every aspect of our life in order to restore the earth and our connection with the Creator of all existence.

Anger Issues

(Numbers 31:14) **“And Moshe became angry with the army officers.”** Moshe, who is considered to have been more humble than any other person, was well aware that there is a time and place for compassion. However, he also knew that there is a time for a leader to speak the truth and reveal harsh realities. This is something that seems to be missing amongst today’s leaders.

His anger was invoked by the empathy and compassion extended by the Israelites towards their enemies in war. This was the enemy who caused the death of many Israelites. Somehow, if we look at today’s leaders we see that time has altered nothing, and we have not collectively learned from the mistakes of our past.

In Numbers (31:14) the Hebrew word used for anger is **“kotchaf.”** It is the same word that is used in Genesis (41:10) **“Pharaoh had been angry with his servants.”** Rabbi S. R. Hirsch writes that the word means “to angrily object to something and put an end to it, or at least limit it. It is related to ending something in an unexpected manner, or to employ force to end something.”

(Esther 1:13) **“And the King became very angry (vayiktzof) and his wrath (chamoso) burned in him.”** The Vilna Gaon (Kol Eliyahu) taught, **“even though he expressed his anger he still could not express all his true inner feelings. “Ketsef” is a revealed anger while “Cheymo” is an inner anger.”** Commentaries explain **“ketsef”** to be bubbling like waves in a storm.

There are eight terms for anger in Hebrew; kaas, zaam, ahf, evroh, charon, cheymo, ketsef and rogez. **“Kaas”** – anger is when the person expands or explodes outward. Rearranging the letters of kaas can read (Proverbs 7:22) **“eches”** meaning something that puts poison into another person. **“Rogez”** is when the whole body is agitated or disturbed.

“Zaam” is when the whole body is shaking with anger and sweat is dripping from the person. **“Ahf”** when vapor is pouring out of the nostrils. **“Cheymo”** is worse than ahf since it means the heat is continually building. **“Evroh”** when it

removes a person from his/her mind or from the Creator. **“Charon”** when the whole body is consumed like in a fire.

(Ecclesiastes 7:9) **“Do not be alarmed in your spirit to become angry, for anger rests in the lap of fools.”** A wise person keeps anger at a distance and uses it when needed, while a fool keeps it with him/her to use at a moment’s notice.

The Shaloh Hakadosh writes that tzitzis can help with controlling anger. The Hebrew word for corner – **“konof”** is the same vibrational value as anger. In the Torah is written (Numbers 15:39) **“and you shall look at them and you will remember all the mitzvos (connections) of Hashem and you will do them and you will not turn after your heart and after your eyes that draw you after them.”**

When you become angry and look at the tzitzis then you will focus on the Creator and not be controlled by the anger. In this way you will fulfill the words (Ecclesiastes 11:10) **“And remove anger from your heart, and remove problems from your flesh.”** Anger affects the flesh of the body and so in removing anger you also remove its negative effects.

(Job 10:17) **“And you magnify your anger against me.”** This is anger that is based in pain. Sefer Shoroshim writes that when a person worries and is in pain he/she becomes angry.

Anger tends to make a person lose wisdom as well, as it negatively impacts upon the physical body. It wraps the person’s mind and feeling in an energy that disconnects him/her from the Creator. Often anger emanates from being self-centered (ego.)

Anger and frustration with life is a common cause of jealousy and anger. Anger has a negative affect on the skin and negatively impacts a person’s health in many ways. Yet, since in life there exists balance of opposites, one’s becoming angry also opens up an opposite energy that can be connected to and utilized to generate mercy.

After Moshe became angry the next thing that happened is that Elozor spoke to the soldiers and gave them directions. One reason that Elozor had to give them guidance is that (Talmud Bavli Pesochim 66b, Midrash rabbah Vayikro 13a) when

Moshe became angry he was no longer able to give clear guidance to the soldiers. Even if right, the anger still negatively impacts on and hurts the person who is angry.

The lessons to be gleaned are clear. Yet we as human beings become so stuck in a variety of controlling forces. Most of these direct us in ways that are contrary to the mission set forth for us by the Creator. We think we know better and can listen to others who tell us exactly what they think they KNOW is the right direction for us to follow.

Until we have learned the lessons from our history, and have truly learned to see the Creator's presence and message in all that we undertake, we will not be on the path to our Redemption.

May the Creator watch over and protect those defenders of Israel, this week especially, and guide them in good stead to safely accomplish the goals that protect the longevity of Israel and her people.

Setting the Priority

On what do you focus as your priorities? Are you fixated on seeing to your personal wealth and comfort? Or, are you driven to pursue your universal task? Both are human responses to needs. The one who runs after wealth all the time is never satisfied that it is enough. The same is true of the zealot who seeks to correct the world by demonstration (and the accompanying enforcement) of belief. However, as with all things, they lose their optimum edge if they are practiced without balance.

There are a myriad of things that are occurring and changing around the world. It is akin to the world placing our heads on a large wheel and randomly spinning it in different directions. These constant distractions make it difficult to focus on anything specific for a prolonged period of time.

It would be wonderful if we could all live together in harmony without being judgmental. However, sadly, it is the happenstance of tragedies that motivate people of prior differences to unite in purpose. What type of energy generation do our collective thoughts and actions motivate?

The collapse of society's systems and comfort space generate fear about what will happen or how we might replace them. Yet, it is the very fertilization and growth of corruption within the systems that we have put in place that cause their eventual demise. When one thing collapses, it makes way for the building of something new. Reformation with leaders who are focused on discovering and teaching truth will provide a solid base for positive growth. This will enable people to discover and unleash their true inner selves as they add their gifts to the positive universal flow.

According to Kabbalah, Midyan was (Moshe's) Moses' spiritual opposite. Moses' focus was on "oneness." Midyan was focused on "division." Moses was told that he would die after Midyan was destroyed. He refrained from telling the people about his ensuing death when he told them to concentrate on this war as God's vengeance against Midyan. Moses stayed focused on God's desires. He understood that if the people had known that the conquest of Midyan would lead to his death, they would not wish to follow God's direction.

We see that the priority of the tribes of Gad and Reuben (Numbers chapter 32) was different. They placed their personal human concerns before those about the war. First they staked their claim of land in the area taken from Midyan, Sichon and Og, the area that is now Jordan. They asked for a place for their cattle; saying to Moses, "We are your servants and you are our master." (The only other time the word master is recorded is with his student Yehoshua (Joshua) in Numbers 11:28.)

Moses responded by reminding them of the trouble caused by the previous generation that did not want to enter the land. The tribes of Gad and Reuben responded by saying that they wished only to settle their cattle and families in cities before going off to fight. They planned to return to "this place" after the battle.

They reiterated their concern for the welfare of their families. Moses' response was "You must do this for God." One meaning of this is suggested by a commentary: Focus on what God wants and place the concern for your personal comfort and security secondary and then you will be successful. However, they received what they asked for, despite their apparent lapse of judgement.

It is interesting to note that in regard to the war with Midyan, the people were instructed to kosher all the pots and pans (taken as booty) (Numbers 31:23). This was not stipulated when referring to the previous war against Sichon and Og. In this current war they took captives. In the fight against Sichon and Og they did not take any captives.

The following is a paraphrase of what the Talmud (Avoda Zoro 75) states regarding the status of non-kosher pot and pans: *The Torah only prohibits using them within a twenty-four hour period from the time it was used for non-kosher food. The reason for this is that within a twenty-four hour period the residue of the non-kosher food still projects a positive flavor into a newly cooked food.*

The enemy was totally vanquished in the war with Sichon and Og. Thus, they were able to be certain that no-one used the pots within a twenty-four hour period. In contrast, following the war against Midyan, the remaining Midyanites used their pots. That is why all of them had to be koshered. The issue of koshering cooking vessels obtained from the spoils of war is mentioned at this juncture and applied to all koshering.

Our priority should be to manage the natural gifts that were given to us. Then we can use our collective blessings and gifts to lift each other up in this time of difficult and painful challenges. We have been given the necessary components to succeed. Together we can remedy the damages we have done to the physical world. We also have the ability and gift to shower love on those who have been hurt. Doing so will allow everyone to open up and face their pains as it enables them to live more fully in the present. All of this will lead to our newly balanced future.

The need to lead leaders

(Numbers Chapters 30-32) The world is round and constantly spinning. It makes no difference which way we are going, or whether or not we are straight; life still spins us around in circles.

Mateh can be translated as: a tribe, a staff or to bend. Just as a person holding a staff can swing it in various directions, leaders find ways to bend people to move or look in a specific direction. Each tribe goes in a different direction. The heads of the tribes were people who could bend people in

the direction of their spiritual source (based on the nature of the people whom they were directing.) Sometimes, in order to accomplish that, we have to bend the emotions toward the mind or the mind towards the heart.

Moses talks to the heads of the tribes since they are chosen to direct the people, at least till the future comes when having a leader may become irrelevant. Meanwhile there are also prophets who see matters from a certain perspective. This means that a prophecy is not something that exists forever. It is temporary based on the issues of the moment.

When the decision was made of which books the “Prophets” should comprise, the decision was to incorporate only those that were relevant to future generations. That is why today we do not have copies of the words from thousands of prophets that walked among the Jews since they were relevant only at that moment in time.

In a previous chapter a leader was killed. Here the importance of a leader is reaffirmed. There are some leaders that destroy the nation quicker than other leaders. Conversely, there are leaders that are good for the people, helping them in their growth. A leader must show that he/she feels the people’s pain. Giving excuses for why things happen or pointing a finger of blame does not help as it usually shows that you are distant from helping the people in their pain.

The Kesav Sofer writes that Moses was punished because he responded to the people (Numbers 20:10), “Listen you rebels,” instead of agreeing and showing the people understanding. Also Jacob is punished for the way that he responded to Rachel (Genesis 30:2), instead of feeling her pain and showing understanding.

Understanding other people and being a leader is a double edged sword. Often it seems best to live in our own personal world but we are also here to be part of the rest of the world. Another aspect of a round world is that we do not know from what angle something will come at us.

People make vows or oaths because they want to have some satisfaction in life. (Shevuah is comprised of the same letters as soveah.) Sometimes

they become tied to something (ossur) and later need to be freed from that attachment (mutter –free). A neder (vow) is a separation from something in creation and needs to be corrected at some point. There is an aspect of the Creator in everything and separating from it is also a separation from that aspect of the Creator.

My father once related how the Lubavitcher Rebbe told him that Monday and Thursday he should learn chassidus in the morning. My father then decided to fast a half-day on those days as well. He then told the Rebbe about it and was told that since he is in business and needs to have strength in dealing with people he should go to Rabbi Zalman Shimon Dvorkin and have his vow annulled.

Sometimes taking something upon oneself is a good thing but it is not necessarily the thing that we should do. When you take your focus away from that which the Creator meant to be natural for you, you go off course, which is chiyt (often translated as sin but actually means off center).

People often make logical judgments but do not deal with the actual cause of why things happen. In Matos the men are killed but they did not kill the women who were part of the cause of the plague. Moses had to tell them to finish the job.

It says that the children of Gad and Reuven have much livestock. The word for livestock is “mikneh,” which means what they are attached to, or have acquired. The word for much is ‘rov’ which can also refer to ‘their leader’, indicating that they have much pleasure from those things to which they have become attached.

This phrase would mean that because Gad and Reuven knew that Moses would pass away before the people went into the land of Israel, they chose to stay with him in that space. Of course they agreed to help the other tribes going into Israel. Yet they did not want to separate from Moses. Throughout time, as well as today, people become attached to a leader and do not want to move beyond that space. So how do we expect a Messiah to come?

Why do we need leaders and society structures? One reason is that we are often not fully responsible for our individual selves. It is possible for us to unite and work together to create a society that lives with balance. Yet many people simply do not live in a way that fosters that goal. People make promises that speak far louder than their actions. Thus it does not happen.

Indeed, we find that the opposite may occur, as the leaders who are speaking are more corrupt than the people for whom they formulate the laws. Understanding the people and being synonymous with them are the most powerful tools a leader can possess. It is sad that this is not properly taught in society; rather it is used as a political tool to hurt people.

People are looking to the year 2020 or for later this year, or for some other "designated date," but what are we really waiting for? It is based upon very limited perspectives of God or creation that we imagine and see a future.

Since the original source of all existence has no beginning or end, after a prescribed time period (i.e. fifty thousand years) everything will eventually cease to exist as time and definition cease to exist (Likutei Torah). Society employs various structures to keep it together, but it can only do so for a limited period of time. There are entities and leaders in society that continue to move the world towards destruction. Where do we find proper guidance? It is a search many have been looking for throughout time.

Torah means guidance but many people have an agenda when they study, search or focus. Our search must be with a pure heart and focus realizing the limitations of all that we see and understand and wanting to unite with the source of life beyond all.

Leaders are changing which reflects changes in people. Hopefully a leader will arise soon who can take people beyond the limitations that beset society into a future that is expansive and visibly one with the source of all life.