



שבת

תשס"ה

Parshat Massei

No 1077:

1 Av 5765 (6 August 2005)

STARTING POINT

The Last Voyage - by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

This week's Torah portion begins with a list of the travels of Bnei Yisrael, starting with Raamses and ending with the Plains of Moav. It is emphasized that Moshe wrote this: "And Moshe wrote their leaving, for all their voyages, according to the word of G-d" [Bamidbar 33:2]. (This follows the interpretation of Ibn Ezra, who feels that the phrase "according to the word of G-d" refers to the travel and not to the writing.) This gives us the opportunity to determine what Moshe thought was the most important thing to emphasize with respect to the travel.

The majority of the list is written in a repetitive style – "And they went ... and they camped..." Most of the time the events that took place while the people camped are not mentioned. For example, it is written, "They left Refidim and they camped in the Sinai Desert" [33:15], without mentioning the events at Sinai at all. In the next verse, it is written, "They left the Sinai Desert and they camped in Kivrot Hata'avah" [33:16], without any mention of the tragic meaning of death behind the name of the place.

There are a few exceptions to the dry style of the list. First, the passage through the Red Sea is mentioned briefly. "And they traveled from Pnei Hachiroth and went through the sea to the desert. And they went along a route for three days in the Eitam Desert and camped at Marah." [33:8]. But it is likely that the main reason for mentioning the passage through the Red Sea is to describe the route that Bnei Yisrael took. There are also two comments related to water. "And they traveled from Marah and came to Eilim. And in Eilim there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there." [31:9]. "And they traveled from Alush and camped in Refidim, but there was no water there for the nation to drink" [31:14]. It is not easy to understand why just these two facts were singled out. The Ramban writes, "The miracle of the water at Marah was not mentioned, nor was the affair of the Manna. The point is that the affair at Refidim was so great, when the nation tested G-d, and the site was named Masah U'Meriva because of the controversy, and in the end G-d was sanctified before their eyes by bringing water out of the rock, and this was followed by the war against Amalek. All of this was summarized in the short phrase, 'there was no water there for the nation to drink.' This was a well known and recognized place."

Near the end of the list of sites there is a startling departure from the pattern. "And Aharon the Priest rose up on the double mountain according to the word of G-d, and he died there in the fortieth year after Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, in the fifth month, on the first of the month. Aharon was 123 years old when he died on the double mountain. And the Canaanite,

the King of Arad, heard, while sitting in the Negev in the Land of Canaan, that Bnei Yisrael came." [31:38-40]. Why was this emphasized in this case?

The death of Aharon and the war with Canaan, which happened shortly afterwards (see Bamidbar 21:1, including Rashi) were very important events for Moshe. This is the only event about which Moshe gives a precise date, except for the redemption from Egypt. It seems that Moshe viewed this as the day when his punishment began, starting with Aharon and leading to Moshe. Aharon's death was a tangible expression of the fact that this time the Almighty would not forgive, and that Moshe would in fact not be able to enter the land in spite of his prayers and requests. As a result of Aharon's death Moshe understood that he would not be the one to finish the list he was writing. The last journey on which he would lead Bnei Yisrael would be the one that had now brought him to the Plains of Moav.

POINT OF VIEW

Dual Personalities - by Prof. Shalom Rozenberg

In this article, I want to escape from current events to the distant past, and to look at what Jewish sources have to say about a troublesome question: How are we to relate to people who drastically change their minds from one side of a controversy to the other? Usually this question is discussed in relation to the phenomenon of repentance. This time I want to discuss the opposite possibility, an event which sometimes happens not only to simple folks but to the leaders of the nation: a priest, a prophet, or a king. This discussion leads to an immediate association with the sad words of Hillel, "Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death" [Avot 2:4]. The Talmud gives a specific example, "Yochanan the High Priest served in his position for eighty years, and in the end he joined the Tzedukim" [Berachot 29a].

This statement appears in the Talmud as a result of an amazing dispute between Abaye and Rava: "Abaye said, according to our tradition a good man will not do bad actions." If a negative transformation has taken place, we should search back in time and study the person's past. Anybody whose actions are bad "must have been evil from the beginning" and never a really

This issue of Shabbat B'Shabbato

לז"נ

מרת הנא בת ר' מרדכי מנדל אלינער

ר' עוזר בן ר' שאול אלינער

הרב שמעון בן ר' זכריה סמנער

righteous person. Rava disagrees, and he feels that a radical transformation is indeed possible. (For another approach, see "Yismach Moshe" commenting on the Torah portion of Re'eih.) One who is righteous can indeed become evil. "Let us be happy if our old age does not put our youth to shame." This leads us to terrible questions. If a husband has turned bad, do his current actions erase the memory of all the good times that a couple had together? On the other hand, is there any point to remember the good times? As far as I am concerned, the words of Rava imply that we cannot retroactively cancel our appreciation of everything that was done by somebody when he acted properly. We must act as if this is another person who stands before us now that he has begun to sin.

Here is what we are taught by the Talmud: "Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai said, "Even somebody who is completely righteous for his entire life and rebels at the end loses his earlier credits, as is written "The righteousness of a righteous man will not rescue him on the day of his sin" [Yechezkel 33:12]." [Kidushin 40b, see also Yerushalmi Pei'ah 5]. The Talmud wonders how all the earlier good deeds can simply be erased. And Raish Lakish replies that we are discussing a case where "he rejects the past actions" – that is, the good actions of the past are ignored only if the person rejects his former approach.

Another example of a negative transformation in our tradition can be seen in the character of Chanania Ben Azur. Yirmiyahu describes how Chanania promised peace and security to the nation, but the prophet then reveals his true colors. "G-d did not send you, but you made false promises to this nation!" [28:15]. According to the Talmud, "At first, Chanania was a true prophet, but in the end he became a false one" [Sanhedrin 90a]. Thus, we see that even a prophet can make a mistake and deteriorate. We will not discuss the case of philosophers who have turned bad, but I must bring the tragic example in the Tanach of the wise king who turned from the proper path when he grew old and he did evil acts. The righteous man became a sinner, or perhaps it is more correct to say that the wise man became a fool. Why did this happen? Did his wives turn his head? Is the family responsible? The Talmud gives another explanation, one that seems to be based on Agada, a symbolic approach. A demon, Ashmadai, took the place of the king. Is this mythology? Perhaps we should understand that Ashmadai did not overpower the king from the outside but from within. Ashmadai is the one that sits on the throne, even though outwardly his appearance is that of the king. This is a symbolic way of saying that a man will not begin to sin unless he has been overcome by a foolish spirit. King Shlomo managed to take control and to regain his own powers of authority. However, it was already too late. His incomprehensible actions led to a split in the nation, which was revealed in the days of his descendants. "I will tear the kingdom away from you" [I Melachim 11:11].

We are all familiar with the declaration of Rabbi Shmuel Bar Rabbi Yitzchak. "There is room on the head for two sets of Tefillin" [Eiruvin 95b]. What is not as clear is the opposite question, discussed by the Talmud, when Plaimo asks Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, "If somebody has two heads, on which one should he wear the Tefillin?" [Menachot 37a]. The rabbi is angered by this fanciful question, and only Plaimo's

righteousness saves him from a reprimand. It quickly becomes apparent that truth is stranger than fiction, and just such a case appears, even though he cannot live for long. The Tosafot recall a story from some unidentified source in the Midrash. We are told that Ashmadai "brought out of the earth a man with two heads." This man "married a woman and had sons," some of which were like him and some of which were like his wife. "When they came to divide their father's heritage, those with two heads demanded two portions, and they came to Shlomo for judgment." According to our tradition, Shlomo's solution was both wise and simple. He poured hot water on one of the heads – if both heads felt pain, it was clear that this was one creature, and if not, there were two men. And we end this article with a question: If one head drags the other one in its direction, can it continue to feel the pain of the second one?

SERMON BY A GUEST

"And They Went and They Camped" – From Days Past Until Now – by Mrs. Sarah Eliash, Ulpanat Lehava, Kedumim

This week's Torah portion begins with a long dry list of 42 journeys taken by Bnei Yisrael. The commentators discuss the meaning of this list. Some see it as an example of the principle of remembrance and historical continuity, such as Rashi, who quotes a parable by Midrash Tanchuma. Bnei Yisrael are compared to the case of a king who brought his son to faraway places in order to find a cure for his sickness. On the return trip, the king reminded his son what had happened to them everywhere along their route. Sforno emphasizes that the people went "according to the word of G-d" [Bamidbar 33:2], even if they were commanded to go to a place that was worse than the one they had left. In the book "Degel Machaneh Efraim" it is written in the name of the Baal Shem Tov that every person goes through these same 42 journeys from the day he is born until the day he dies. In this view, the purpose of the list of journeys is to "teach the man from Yisrael the proper path, so that he will know what route to follow for his entire life, moving from one journey to the next."

At the present time, we are all in the midst of a difficult and painful journey, and nobody knows exactly where we will stop: will it be in Marah [bitterness], Charada [fear], or Yotvata? The personal journeys blend with the national-historic ones. This is the essence of the experience of the march that took place from Netivot to Kefar Maimon. It can be compared to the Exodus from Egypt, where every participant (men, women, and children) felt that he or she was part of a momentous undertaking.

We firmly believe that our journey is "according to the word of G-d," but at the same time we find ourselves slandered, pursued, and silenced. Is this like the journey of Yosef, which was etched so strongly into our national consciousness that the deaths of ten rabbinical martyrs were blamed on this sale/journey of a brother? Are we once again in a situation where brothers look at each other from a distance ("They saw him from far away, and before he approached them..." [Bereishit 37:18])? Jewish history is full of brothers pursuing each other, spiteful hate, informers, and surrender to our enemies. At difficult times, I feel the full burden of this journey,

and I remember all the hate mongers and purveyors of destruction that have arisen from within our own people. But then I remember that there have also been times when we have risen to the greatest possible heights of dedication, spiritual elevation, and kindness. If we want to end the journey on a good note, we must make sure to emphasize a positive outlook of the present events.

But can it be that we are at the way station of Paran, where the "silent majority" began to despise the desired land and would not listen to how very good the land can be? Is it possible that we have attempted to jump too high while the nation is still interested in remaining at Mount Shefer, such that the command to conquer the existing inhabitants upsets the people? It sometimes looks as if a spirit of idolatry lies behind the waves of slander and hate, a spirit that feels a need to offer a sacrifice as a way of decreasing guilt feelings for having conquered the land. Only something deep and primeval can explain the irrational approach that began at the time of the Oslo agreements.

In these days of mourning, let us hope and pray that we will succeed in leaving Egypt behind, to fulfill the verse, "He will find favor in the desert ... He will bring calm to Yisrael" [Yirmiyahu 31:1].

TORAH, SOCIETY, AND GOVERNMENT

"Let Them Marry Whoever Appears Good in Their Eyes" - by Rabbi Uri Dasberg

What will happen if, for example, Chogla likes somebody, but he has some hidden sickness, physical or mental, or perhaps something that will lead to esthetic problems? Must he tell his prospective bride about his faults? If so, at what stage must they be revealed? Must it be at the very beginning of their relationship, or can it be later, when love might be expected to take precedence over a possible blemish?

On one hand, hiding information is fraud. A person who knowingly gives advice that is not honest violates the prohibition, "Do not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person" [Vayikra 19:14]. (After all, he asked, "Will you marry me?" when he knew that there was a reason for her to refuse.) According to the Rambam, one who knows about an injustice and does not tell the victim also violates the prohibition, "Do not stand aside when your friend's blood is in danger" [19:16], he is not allowed to stand on the sidelines and remain quiet. Note also that revealing such information is not slander. This is clear from the fact that blemishes that can be seen in the bathhouse are not a reason for invalidating a marriage, since it is assumed that the relatives of the groom will see them and tell him. Thus, it is clear that the relatives are not forbidden to talk about these blemishes because of the laws of slander and "lashon hara."

On the other hand, not every blemish must be explicitly revealed. There are things that a person should be able to see for himself. And if he does not react, he cannot invalidate the marriage. A convert, who does not have any Jewish family background, is not required to reveal to a prospective bride about his situation. If she has any doubts, she should make it

her business to find out the truth. He can assume that once he and his wife become fond of each other his lack of family relations will not be considered a fault at all. However, health faults that may be passed on to later generations are an exception to this and must be revealed (the details of any hereditary illness can be discussed with a physician).

Let us assume that Chogla indeed knows about a blemish in her proposed groom. Must she tell her mother about this? (Remember that the mother will probably pay for the wedding, since her father Tzlofchad was no longer alive.) Perhaps the mother is not willing to cooperate in such a wedding. There is no definite rule about this issue. But one thing is clear: Chogla is not required to tell a prospective groom about her own family problems during their first date (for example, that her father was a sinner). She can wait with such information until the man begins to like her.

Reference: Rabbi Yoel and Dr. Channa Qatan, "Techumin," volume 25, pages 47-58

A LESSON FOR THE CHILDREN

What a Child Can Do (Part 2) - by Rabbi Yikhat Rozen, Merkaz Neria, Kiryat Malachi

What a Child Can Do (Part 2) - by Rabbi Yikhat Rozen, Merkaz Neria, Kiryat Malachi

Summary of the previous chapter: Little Johann was alone with his herd of cows near the great dyke, when he suddenly saw that the wall had cracked and drops of water were coming through. He understood that very quickly the water would widen the crack, destroy the dam completely, and bring about a terrible disaster for the entire area.

Johann saw that he would not be able to bring help in time, and the only thing that he could do was block the hole by himself. He tried to stuff the hole with sand and small stones, but they were ejected within a few seconds. He tried to stop the water with a rolled-up handkerchief, but this also did not last more than a minute or two.

Johann had very little choice, and he decided to try another approach. He put his finger in the hole and leaned on the wall of the dyke. This time his tactic worked. The flow of water stopped. Johann felt the pressure on his finger, but he managed to push it in very hard, so that the water was blocked. Johann sighed from relief, and he thanked G-d for saving the people. He held on tight, hoping that soon somebody would pass by who could call for help from the village and set him free.

One hour passed, and then another, and then the sun set, and night fell. But not a single person passed by. "Let somebody come! When will somebody pass by here?" This is what Johann asked himself, more and more nervous all the time. But there was no response at all. The pressure on his finger and the pain increased steadily, but he gritted his teeth and held on, not even letting out a sigh. His strength barely held out, but he gathered his strength and continued holding his finger in the hole, hoping and praying, and continuing to wait.

Meanwhile, in Johann's home, his parents were beginning to worry. He had never come home so late before. What had happened? Where was Johann? The sun had set a long time ago. It was very dark, where could the boy have gone?

The worried parents asked Johann's friends if they knew anything, but nobody could tell them where their son had gone. Search parties began to look in the area, looking in ever widening circles. At first, they did not find anything, but when dawn came one of the searchers arrived in the area of the dyke, and ran towards the small figure that could be seen next to the wall.

"Thank G-d that you came! Help me! Please close the hole in the dyke." These were the last words that Johann cried out, before he fainted and fell. His finger came out of the wall, and a strong flow of water burst out of the wall. The others immediately understood just how brave Johann had been. One of the searchers, a builder by trade, arranged to block the hole, and ran to the village to bring tools and material to make a permanent repair.

The others carried the boy and brought him to the village doctor. He put Johann on a bed and checked him over from head to foot, looking especially at his finger, which had turned black. In a short time, Johann woke up and returned to himself, but the doctor was sad to tell him that the finger would never return to the way it was before. Because of the great pressure that it had withstood it had become infected and the only thing that could be done was to amputate it to prevent the infection from spreading to the rest of Johann's body and threatening his life.

Johann, the dear little Dutch boy, lost his finger. But in doing so he saved the entire area and became a symbol for the traits of courage and dedication.

(Source: A Dutch folktale)

THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS (Pirkei Avot)

Chapter 2 - by Rabbi Yehuda Shaviv

In the middle of Mishna 4, a series of statements by Hillel begins, until Mishna 7. And this is difficult to understand, since Hillel was also quoted several times in Chapter 1 (more than any other specific rabbi). Why then were his words quoted again, after the words of Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi? In some of the editions of Avot, the name is in fact written as Rabbi Hillel, referring to the son of the third Rabban Gamliel. This implies that Chapter 2 is written in chronological sequence: Rabbi (Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi), Rabban Gamliel, and then Rabbi Hillel. However, commentators have indicated that the correct version is indeed "Hillel." This corresponds to Mishna 8, which discusses Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai, who received the Torah from Hillel and Shamai, thus continuing directly from the preceding statements in Mishna 4-7.

In view of this approach, let us look at the statements of Hillel in Mishna 4. All the statements begin with the negative, "Do not..." There are five statements: "Do not separate yourself from the community. Do not believe in yourself until the day you die. Do not judge your friend until you reach his position.

Do not say something that will not be heard, because in the end it will be heard. Do not say, when I have time I will study, perhaps you will never find the time."

The last two pieces of advice have a different form from the first three, in that a reason for them is included. (There are some manuscripts which do not include these two items.) In general, it is possible to find links between these five items and the words of Hillel from the previous chapter.

The first statement – Do not separate yourself from the community – is related to what appears in Mishna 14 of Chapter 1: "When I am for myself, what am I?" The earlier case is keyed to the person himself, while the new Mishna spells out the relationship to the rest of the community, based on the fact that a person who only thinks about himself is not worth anything.

The next statement – Do not believe in yourself until the day you die – can be viewed as a continuation of the first one in this Mishna. Sometimes a person will leave the community out of a feeling that he has the power to accomplish everything on his own, that he has no need for a community. Hillel therefore teaches us not to leave the community, because we can never have complete faith in our own abilities when we are alone. This also serves as a limitation on Hillel's words in Chapter 1, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" This is true, but there are limits to individual power.

We can now look at the third piece of advice. When you remain involved in the community, beware of judging your friend unless you occupy his position. Even as part of a community, every individual has a special role to fulfill, based on his strengths and inclinations, on his background and skills. No person – no matter how sympathetic he is to everybody else – can judge somebody else before he reaches the same position.

The last item – Do not say when I have time I will study – is linked very strongly to Hillel's words in Mishna 13 of Chapter 1, discussing the obligation to study Torah and to be involved with it constantly.

Evidently, Hillel's words in this chapter are related to his pursuit of the righteous path that a man should choose, something discussed by Rabbi in the beginning of the chapter and by his student Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai later on. They can be summarized as corresponding to his earlier teaching, that the best path is one that provides for the proper balance between the need for personal development of Torah study and becoming absorbed as part of the community.

LAND OF MY BIRTH

Redeemer of the Land, Yehoshua Chenkin - by Zev Wallack

Yehoshua Chenkin was a boy of 17 when he arrived in Eretz Yisrael with his family (in the year 5642, 1882). They were among the first people to settle in Rishon Letzion, and from there they moved to the settlement of the Bilu movement, Gedeira. Here he married Olga, who stood by his side in all of his subsequent activities. For fifty years, he toiled endlessly in the task of buying property for the Zionist enterprise. He had

many important traits: A belief in the need to settle the land, dedication to his goals, a friendly attitude towards the Arabs, and expertise in agriculture.

First he redeemed the lands of Rechovot and Gedeira, and he then went on to purchase land in many places within Eretz Yisrael. His main achievement was the redemption of the Yizrael Valley in 1921. Here is how the area looked at the time:

"Most of the valley of Yizrael is a great wilderness... There are a few poor Arab villages. There is not a single tree on the plains... The Kishon River, which crosses the valley, and the many flowing springs... have transformed the valley into a swamp, which has filled the air with deadly fever..."

However, Chenkin was very familiar with the good properties of the black earth of the valley, which was much more fertile than the sandy earth of the coastal areas that he had purchased previously. Without any official or financial backing of any kind, he finalized a deal with the owner of the land, an Arab named Surkus. Now all that remained was a small detail – to obtain the astronomical sum of money that he needed. He turned to Dr. Arthur Rupin, the head of the settlement department of the Jewish Agency, who kept a record of their discussion:

Chenkin: "I have 70,000 dunams of land in the valley, we must redeem them." Rupin: "I am interested too in having this deal take place, but where will we find so much money?" Chenkin: "If you decide against this deal and the sale is cancelled, my loss is unimportant. But we will lose this land, it will fall out of our hands." Rupin: "There are no funds, the Baron refuses to buy anything more, the fund of the 'Society for Preparing Settlements' is empty, and there are only a few pennies in the Keren Kayemet..." Chenkin: "We absolutely must buy this land." Rupin (in anger, to himself): "Where will this man lead us, with his demands for hundreds of thousand of Pounds? Where to?"

Chenkin convinced Surkus to spread the payment out over a period of six years. What he needed then was the approval of the settlement authorities. First the deal was approved by the committee in Eretz Yisrael, headed by Ussishkin. The contract was then sent for the approval of the directors of the Keren Kayemet in Europe. The directors criticized the Israeli committee for going beyond their authority and agreeing to such a large transaction without approval. However, after a dispute, the purchase was finally approved. The affair reached the twelfth Zionist Congress (1921), and led to an angry discussion by the delegates. Some of those in favor of the purchase had this to say in order to convince their opponents:

Berl Katznelson: "We have waited for 28 years to redeem the land in the valley. Yehoshua Chenkin has labored to accomplish this goal for years, and now that he has managed to close the deal the leaders oppose him, saying that the price is too high..." Dr. A. Rupin: "It is true that 'we sinned' by making purchases that were not approved in advance by the directors, and in so doing we exceeded our authority. But at the time, we had to decide whether to accept the deal or lose these lands. In this situation, you can forgive us for exceeding our authority." Menachem Ussishkin: "If you find that the purchase was

expensive, you can say that Rupin and Ussishkin were bad merchants. However, if we had not bought the land you would have called us sinners... I accept your criticism in silence. You can expel me from the management, but the valley will become Jewish land." (Greeted by excited applause.)

In his old age, Chenkin wrote what amounted to a last will and testament for future generations, which included the following:

"I have grown old, I will soon reach my eightieth birthday. I would therefore like to take my leave of my nation before I pass on. Sixty years ago, I discovered the role that I had been given by the Divine guidance: the redemption of the land for our nation, which yearned for it. I was attached to this goal, and I worked very hard to achieve the objective, with all my soul, while I was still alive. I made it my business to redeem broad desolate areas, I worked on large projects but did not ignore small ones. There were many obstacles in my path, both external and internal... We must remember that the only way we will achieve the full redemption of our precious birthplace is by constant dedication and unbounded faith in the righteousness of our exalted concept."

(Source: Zevulun Porah, "Yehoshua Chenkin")

THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Year-End Celebration for Midreshet Chemed - by the Department of Education, World Mizrahi

Fifty young women of the Sheirut Leumi national service program ended the school year with a gathering in honor of their work in Chemed Midrashot all over the country. The girls worked in Chadeira, Afula, Nahariya, Tveria, Ramat Gan, Petach Tikva, Ashdod, Lod, Dimona, and Jerusalem. During the ceremony, the girls presented examples of the life in the Midrashot.

The guests of honor included: MK Zvulun Orlev, the head of the Mafdal party, who discussed the principle of giving practiced by the young women as an educational value and as a basis for their future lives; Mr. Eliezer Shefer, head of the world council of Torah education, who praised the activities of the Midrashot; Dr. Yaacov Hadeni, head of Michtelef Lifshitz, who called on the girls to continue their development in the area of education; and Mr. Elimelech Landner, head of the Department of Education of World Mizrahi, who greeted the girls, promising to promote continued fruitful activities by the Midrashot.

The day started with a tour of the new Begin Heritage Center, where the participants learned about Menachem Begin and his political path, rising in the end to the position of Prime Minister of Israel. They then continued the day with observations from the Armon Hanatziv in Jerusalem and a tour of the area. This was led by Elyada Bar Shaul, who kept the girls spellbound with stories about the area, from the days of Avraham to modern times.

The coordinators of the program were Tzvika Weinberger and the head of the "Amichai" Chemdat Midrasha in Jerusalem, Ayala Nachmani.

THE CHAIN OF HALACHA

Bathing During the Nine Days - by Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, Rabbi of Southern Alon Shevut and a teacher in Yeshivat Har Etzion

The Talmud quotes a Baraita which discusses the day before Tisha B'Av, where it is written that during specific hours of this day it is forbidden to wash (Taanit 30a). Then the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael Ben Rabbi Yossi is brought, stating that "during the hours that eating meat is still permitted, washing is allowed."

This implies that everybody agrees that before Tisha B'Av washing is permitted. However, the early commentators made the time of the prohibition earlier. According to the Rambam, "All of Yisrael has already accepted upon itself not to eat meat during the week of Tisha B'Av, and not to enter the bathhouse, until the fast day is over." [Hilchot Taanit 5:6]. Thus, the prohibition of bathing begins at the start of the week when Tisha B'Av occurs.

The early Ashkenazi commentators were even more stringent. According to the Rokeach, "I asked these questions of the most prominent of our rabbis, Kelonimous, from Rome: 'When must one refrain from washing?' ... He replied that one must refrain from washing starting from Rosh Chodesh Av, and it is also prohibited on Rosh Chodesh itself, as is written, 'Its holiday, its Shabbat, and its new month' [Hoshaya 2:13]. Before Rosh Chodesh washing is permitted." [Chapter 312].

In practice, the Sephardim refrain from washing only during the week of Tisha B'Av, following the early Sephardic rabbis (see Yavia Omer, volume 5, Orach Chaim 41). The Ashkenazim are more stringent, and they do not wash starting from the beginning of Av, following the opinion of Rabbi Kelonimous and other rabbis.

Leniency

In the Mishna we are taught about Rabban Gamliel, who "washed himself the first night after his wife had died. His students asked him, Did our rabbi not teach us that one who is in mourning is not permitted to wash? And he replied, I am not like everybody else, I am especially sensitive." [Berachot 15b]. This was also accepted by the Shulchan Aruch, noting however, that "not everybody is permitted to say, 'I am sensitive.'" (Yoreh Dei'ah 381:3).

In modern times, and especially taking into account our hot climate and our usual habits of hygiene, evidently everybody can be included in the above definition. Thus, washing during the Nine Days is not meant as a pleasure but rather for purposes of cleanliness. This means that it is permitted (and probably recommended for reasons of self respect) to take showers during the Nine Days. However, one should be sparing with the number of showers, taking them only when needed, and they should be short, only what is needed for becoming clean. (Ideally, one should shower with cold water, but if this is difficult a small amount of hot water can be added.) One who is serving in the IDF can certainly take showers according to his normal practice.

Next Friday, before Shabbat Chazon (the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av), it is permitted to wash using hot water (Shulchan Aruch 260), because we have been commanded to wash before Shabbat (see Shabbat 25).

Bathing in the ocean during the Three Weeks (between 17 Tamuz and Tisha B'Av): In general it is not prohibited to bathe in the sea (except for the Nine Days, when it is a custom not to bathe, unless it is necessary for health reasons). However, two factors should be considered (this is also relevant to field trips and outings): (1) Joy, and (2) danger. One should refrain from participating in events of exaggerated joy (and therefore one should refrain from an improper attitude when going to swim). From the point of view of danger, we have been taught that a dangerous demon has power during the Three Weeks, based on the verse, "All of her pursuers caught her in the time of stress" [Eicha 1:3]. Thus, it is even more important than ever to swim only in a place where there is no danger. In the Nine Days one should decrease actions related to joy, and it is best to refrain from going on outings or to swim (in unusual circumstances, one should consult a competent rabbi).



This publication is distributed by the RELIGIOUS ZIONISTS OF AMERICA - MIZRACHI and by THE ZOMET INSTITUTE OF ALON SHVUT. It is an extract from SHABBAT B'SHABBATO, a weekly bulletin distributed in hundreds of synagogues in Israel and has been translated by Moshe Goldberg. If you are interested in sponsoring an issue of Shabbat B'Shabbato, contact the RZA Mizrahi office at 212-465-9234 or mizrachi@rza.org .

Vote for
the
Soul
of Israel



REGISTER NOW

<https://www.escvote.com/azm2005/default.asp?locid=RZA>