

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MASEI

Travel and Exile

These are the travels of the Children of Israel... (Num. 33:1). The Chida, writes in his commentary to the *Haggada Shel Pesach* that the first letters of the words in the phrase “These are the travels of the Children of Israel” (אלה מסעי בני ישראל) are the same as the first letters of the four kingdoms who exiled the Jewish People (אדום מדי בבל יון). Rabbi Nosson Nota Shapiro, in his work *Megaleh Amukos* also takes note of this, and he adds that the first letters of the four wars in which the Jewish people violated the ban on consecrated booty spells out the word “travels” (מסעי = מדין סיחון עוג יריחו) as if to say that those violations are why the Jewish were sent into exile. He also explains that this is why the cantillation mark on the word “these” (אֵלֶּה) is the note *azla geresb* (אזלא גרש) which also means “chased away”—an apt description of what made the Jews go into exile.

What is called Pesach?

From the morrow of the Pesach... (Num. 33:3). The *Chizkuni* writes that the day of the 15th of Nissan and the night before are called Pesach because the Korban Pesach is offered on the 14th of Nissan (i.e. what we colloquially call Erev Pesach), and eaten the next night. But, he notes that in the Torah’s nomenclature, the term Pesach does not apply to the entire seven-day holiday, rather the entire holiday is called *Chag HaMatzos* (“The Festival of Matzos”). *Chizkuni* (to Lev. 23:5) elsewhere notes that the 14th and 15th of Nissan can be called Pesach, but the rest of the holiday is called *Chag HaMatzos*.

The Tosafos Chadashim (in the beginning of *Pesachim*) cites a lengthy explanation from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (author of *Kedushas Levi*) to explain why the tractate dealing with the laws of Passover is called *Pesachim* and why we colloquially call the entire seven-holiday Pesach, while the Torah only calls the holiday *Chag HaMatzos* and not *Pesach*. Why did the rabbis change/deviate from the Torah’s naming convention?

The Torah in Num. 9 tells the story of the Jews performing the Paschal Sacrifices in the first month of the second year since the Exodus. Chronologically, that is the first event described in the Book of Numbers, yet for some reason, Numbers is purposely out of order and begins with the second month of the second year (Num. 1:1) and only later relates the story of the Paschal Offering in the first month of the second year. Why does the Torah go out of order in this case? Rashi (to Num 9:1) explains that the Torah did not want to begin Numbers with the story of the Paschal Offering because that underscores an unflattering fact to the Jewish People that they only brought the Paschal Sacrifice once during their forty year sojourn in the desert. Because of this, the Torah buried the story in Chapter 9 instead of highlighting by putting it at the beginning of the book. Based on this, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explains that because Hashem loves the Jewish People so much, He did not want the Torah to call the holiday Pesach which might conjure this unflattering fact that the Jewish People

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MASEI

only brought the Paschal Offering once during their stay in the desert. Because of this, the Torah calls the holiday *Chag HaMatzos* instead of Pesach. However, once the Jewish people had left the desert and began offering the Paschal Sacrifices on a regular yearly basis, then it was appropriate to call the holiday Pesach (as means of commemorating Hashem “jumping” over the Egyptians’ houses) and there is no problem to mention the word Pesach because at that point the Jews were bringing the sacrifice like they were supposed to.

With this in mind Rabbi Levi Yitzchak offers an answer to the Ibn Ezra’s question (cited by Tosafos to *Rosh HaShannah* 13a). The Gemara (there) assumed that when Yehoshua reports that the Jews offered the Omer sacrifice (Josh. 5:11), this was on the 16th of Nissan, because it says “from the morrow of the Pesach”. The Ibn Ezra asks that in our verse here in *Parshas Masei*, it is evident that that the term “from the morrow of the Pesach” refers to the 15th of Nissan because only the 14th of Nissan is called Pesach. So why then does the Talmud assume that when the same phrase appears in Joshua it means the 16th of Nissan? In light of the above, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak answers that since in Yehoshua’s time the Jewish already circumcised themselves and collectively brought the Paschal Offerings, then it was no longer unflattering for the entire holiday to be called Pesach, such that even the 15th of Nissan could be called Pesach, so “from the morrow of the Pesach” can now refers to the 16th of Nissan, even though in Torah it only meant the 15th of Nissan.

Alternatively, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explains that the two different names for the holiday reflect two different points of view. He explains that it is well-known that just as the Jewish People pride themselves for their relationship with Hashem, Hashem also prides Himself for His relationship with the Jewish People. For example, in our *tefillin* we have written different passages about Hashem taking us out of Egypt, and the Talmud says (*Brachos* 6a) that Hashem Himself also wears *tefillin* (so to speak), and in His *tefillin* it is written the praise of the Jewish People. Accordingly, from the Jews’ point of view, the entire holiday should be called Pesach because the word *pesach* is related to having “mercy” or “pity” on others, so in the name of the holiday we praise Hashem for having mercy on us and saying us from bondage. However, from Hashem’s perspective, the holiday should be called *Chag HaMatzos*. This is because the term *matzah* stresses the Jews’ praise in that they heeded to Hashem’s call to exit Egypt quickly and not allow their bread to leaven. Because Hashem wants to sing of the Jews’ praises, from the Torah’s perspective, the holiday’s name is *Chag HaMatzos*.

From Alush to Refidim

And they travelled from Alush, and they camped at Refidim, and there there was no water for the nation to drink (Num. 33:14). Rabbi Chaim Palagi (in *Tenufah Chaim*, 4) writes that the fact that there was no water for the Jews to drink Refidim was a measured punishment because they weakened their hold on the Torah at Refidim and the Torah is compared to water. Therefore, Hashem made sure that *they* wouldn’t have water. He also

*Much of the material presented in **Oneg!** has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the **Oneg!** weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of **Oneg!** send an email to BKLAshul@gmail.com*

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MASEI

explains the Jews argued that since they were wayfarers and travelers, they were too busy travelling to toil in Torah study. Because of this, Hashem befittingly made sure that while they were travelling, there would also be no water in the forms of wellsprings or wells. He also adds that in the passage at hand, the Torah levelled its criticism against the Jewish People. This is because Chazal tell us that at Alush, the manna began to fall (see *Nachal Kedumim*) and the Torah was only given for people who eat the manna. Accordingly, our verse which says that they travelled from Alush to Refidim means to criticize them for failing to study Torah even though Hashem gave them the manna.

King David and the Dust of *Lashon HaRa*

And they travelled from the Sinai desert and they camped at Kivrot HaTaava. And they travelled from Kivrot HaTaava and they camped at Chatzerot. And they travelled from Chatzerot, and they camped at Risma (Num. 33:16–18). Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch HaLevi Horowitz in *Lachmei Todah* (p. 88a) writes in the name of his illustrious father Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz (The *Haflaah*) in the name of a certain great person the following homiletic: King David wrote in Psalms, “I have been muted, quiet, silenced from good, and my pain was destructive, my heart became heated inside of me, in my thoughts burned a fire, I spoke with my tongue” (Ps. 39:3–4). He explains that this refers to what Chazal say (Bava Basra 165a): There are three things from which a person cannot be saved every day and one of them is “the dust of *lashon hara*”. The Gemara explains that the “the dust of *lashon hara*” refers to somebody who says “there is a fire in so-and-so’s house” which Rashi explains means to that this person is rich because he always has a fire lit in his house to cook food. Now the rabbis also say that anybody who slanders another, then all sorts of suffering and afflictions will befall him. Accordingly, King David meant to say that when he was “muted, quiet” i.e. when he was careful not to say *lashon hara* about others, he was even “silenced from good” i.e. he was even meticulous to make sure that he wouldn’t say something good about another, as the Chazal say that one shouldn’t speak excessively and too effusively well of another, for through his speaking well of another, he will arrive at speaking about him disparagingly. (According to some, this is limited to doing so before people who dislike that person, for they will likely deny these positive things, or at least temper them with negative things, “yes, but he’s not that great because...” Still King David laments that even when he acted in this way, “my pain was destructive” meaning he still received all sorts of Divine affliction. So “my heart became heated inside of me” means that he searched in the depths of his heart to find out what he would be receiving such punishments for, if he hadn’t said anything bad or even good about others, when suddenly “in my thoughts” he remembered that “burned a fire’, I spoke with my tongue” meaning that he verbally said something along the lines of “there is a fire in so-and-so’s house” which still might be considered “the dust of *lashon hara*”.

Much of the material presented in Oneg! has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the Oneg! weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of Oneg! send an email to BKLashul@gmail.com

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MASEI

Based on this, R. Horowitz explains that when King David said: “O Hashem, save my soul from the language of falsehood, from the tongue of deceit” (Ps. 120:2) this means that he asked Hashem to not only save him from saying something untrue or negative about another, but to even save him from saying something exalted (רמיא = deceit, but shares a root with the word התרוממות = exaltedness) or positive about another which can bring a person to violating the rules of *Lashon Hara*. With this, he explicates the continuation of that passage which reads: “What will He give you, and what will He add for you, the tongue of deceit? Sharpened arrows of a warrior with glowing coals”. Meaning, if a person speaks with a tongue of deceit, he will befittingly receive a punishment of “glowing coals” (*gachlei resamim*) because he spoke along the lines of “there is a fire in so-and-so’s house” he will be paid back with a fire.

With all this said, R. Horowitz turns to the verses at hand in *Parshas Masei* and finds an allusion to this in the passage that says: “And they travelled from the Sinai desert and they camped at Kivros HaTaava. And they travelled from Kivros HaTaava and they camped at Chatzeros. And they travelled from Chatzeros, and they camped at Risma”. The Mishnah says that anybody who stops learning Torah to admire the wonders of creation will be “fed glowing coals” as his punishment. He explains that this is because once somebody takes a break from studying Torah, his idling away will bring him to be drawn after futile worldly desires in taverns and such places where people regularly speak *lashon hara*, or at the tables of the rich and wealthy where “the dust of *lashon hara*” is the norm. Accordingly, he explains that “And they travelled from the Sinai desert and they camped at Kivros HaTaava” means that if one travels away from the Torah (which was given at Sinai) then they will reach *Kivros HaTaava*—literally, “graves of the desire”—i.e. they will be drawn after physical desires. From there, the situation deteriorates “And they travelled from Kivros HaTaava and they camped at Chatzeros” meaning from *Kivros HaTaava* they will end up at various *chatzeros* – “courtyards” where they will get drunk. Finally, “And they travelled from Chatzeros, and they camped at Risma” – they will end up at *risma* the place of “glowing coals” (*gachlei risamim*) which is the punishment/byproduct of associating with people who speak *lashon hara* and/or engage in “the dust of *lashon hara*”.

This idea that if a person stops learning Torah, he will automatically start engaging in *Lashon Hara* is said quite strongly by Rabbi Chaim Palagi in *Hachaim Yoducha* (to Ps. 1) who cites the Midrash Tehillim (Buber), “Hashem only gave the Jews the Torah so that they would not speak *Lashon HaRa*”. Indeed, the Talmud (*Arachin* 15a) says that the Torah is the antidote to *Lashon Hara*, as it says in Tehillim, “the healer of the tongue [is] the tree of life” and indeed Torah study atones for the sin of *Lashon Hara* as it is the complete opposite of *Lashon HaRa* because it is using speech for something good and productive, as opposed to *Lashon HaRa* which uses the power of speech for something negative and destructive. There is no middle ground with speech – it is either life giving, or ruinous.

Much of the material presented in Oneg! has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the Oneg! weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of Oneg! send an email to BKLashul@gmail.com

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MASEI

Courtyard of the Lord

And they travelled from Chatzerot, and they camped at Risma (Num. 33:18). Rabbi Chaim Ibn Attar (*Or Hachaim* to Deut. 1:1) explains that the place-name of Chatzeros signifies the study of Torah, because the *Beis Midrash* (“Study Hall”) is the “courtyard” (chatzer) of God. With this in mind, Rabbi Chaim Palagi in *Tenufah Chaim* (6) explains the meaning of the rabbinic exhortation (*Chagiga* 12b): “Whoever interrupts from the word of Torah to engage in the words of conversation, he will be fed glowing coals” (*gachalei risamim*), which he adduced from the verse “And they travelled from Chatzeros, and they camped at Risma.”

Chicken City

And they camped in Etzyon Gaver¹ (Num. 33:35). Targum Yonasan translates the name *Etzyon Gaver* as “The City of Chicken”. The *Yalkut Reuveni* cites Rabbi Menachem Tziyyoni that the Kabbalists explain that the city of Etzyon Gaver was called so because its inhabitants were fluent in a certain form of wisdom called “The Knowledge of the Chicken”. This is alluded to in the name of the city because *gever* is a synonym for *tarnegol* (chicken). Chicken were viewed as particularly intelligent because they were able to discern between day and night, and their “crown” (i.e. comb) symbolizes all sorts of esoteric ideas. Tziyyoni mysteriously writes that one who understands the secret of the Tower which flies in the air will begin to understand the secret behind all of this.

The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 105b) says that Hashem becomes angry every day sometime during the first three hours of the day when the rooster’s “crown”² turns completely white and loses its redness. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi had a neighbor who was a heretic and used to constantly bother Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. One day, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi took a chicken and tied its feet and sat it down in front of him, saying “when that moment [that Hashem becomes angry] comes, I will curse him [the neighbor].” That moment arrived, but Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi had dozed off, so when he woke up he said that he this taught him the lesson that its not nice do to this.

Shem MiShmuel (*Likkutim*, end of Devarim p. 260) clarifies the meaning of this idea by explaining that roosters name, *gever*, is related to the word *Gevurah* which is related to Justice and opposed to Mercy. The color red symbolizes Hashem’s trait of Justice, while the color white symbolizes His trait of Mercy. (As we see in the Temple, the red string represented sin, and it turning white represented forgiveness. When Hashem created the

¹ The name *Etzyon Gaver* (when spelled without a vav like *Minchas Shai* says it should be) in *gematria* (עצין גבר = 425) equals the same as the phrase “Messiah son of David” (משיח בן דוד = 424 +1).

² See *Brachos* 7a and *Avodah Zarah* 4a which say that Hashem’s daily anger is caused by the gentile kings waking up in the morning, putting on their crown, and then bowing down to the sun. Perhaps because His anger is associated with those kings’ crown, it is demonstrated by the rooster’s crown (i.e. its comb).

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MASEI

world, He originally created it with just Justice, but when He realized that such a world cannot exist, he mixed into it Mercy to allow things to exist even if they do not deserve it.) Mercy represents a need to be forgiving, which represents that humans are not really deserving. Now generally, there is an admixture of justice and mercy, since people are somewhat deserving and not entirely wicked. When the rooster's comb loses its redness, this alludes to a point in time when Justice is completely non-existent and there is only Mercy. This means that things should not really exist if measured by the rubric of Justice, but they continue to exist solely because of Hashem's Mercy. This gives the appearance of Hashem not actively administering the world, but it looks as if the world continues to exist on its own without any Divine intervention. When people look at the world in this way, it generally ignites the wrath of Hashem against his creations not recognizing his role. In that time when it appears as though Hashem is not actively administering the world, one can influence others through *kisbaf* – black magic which presupposes that one can influence the world while avoiding God, or even in apparent contradistinction to His will; as Balaam tried to do, through witchcraft and/or cursing.

Peirush HaRokach al HaTorah writes that when Balaam calls himself a *gever*, that is because Balaam was like a rooster. For example, he notes just like the Talmud says that roosters engage in frequent copulation, so was Balaam likewise obsessed with sexual deviance.³ When it comes to the city of Etzyon Gaver, *Peirush HaRokach* explains that it was called so because in that city lived people who were especially good at giving advice (Etzyon related to *etzza*, counsel) and were in touch with their intuitions, much like roosters can intuit the time of day.

Aharon's Legacy

And Aharon ascended Hor HaHar by the word mouth of Hashem, and he died there in the fortieth year to the exit of the Children of Israel from the Land of Egypt in the fifth month, on the first of the month. And Aharon was one-hundred and twenty-three years when he died on Hor HaHar (Num. 33:38–39). Rabbi Avraham Schorr writes (in *HaLekach VeHaLibuv* to Avos, vol. 2, s.v. הוי מתלמידו של אהרן) that Aharon lived 123 years which corresponds to the 123 years of Avraham Avinu from the time that he turned 52 (*bakol*) and began teaching Torah, which is when the 2000 years of Torah began and he started converting proselytes, until his death at the age of 175 (175 – 52 = 123). The Mishnah says that one should be of the students of Aharon, loving people and bringing them closer to Torah—which is the main way to sanctify Hashem's name. Because of this,

³ Indeed, the Talmud explains that Ezra instituted that men who have seminal emissions become ritually impure so that the Torah Scholars will not be “always busting around their wives like roosters”. Moreover, man's sexual stamina is known as *koach gavra* because it too recalls the rooster's habits (as Rav Tzaddok writes in *Tzidkas HaTzaddik* 147). Moreover, the Talmud (*Shabbos* 110b) says that if one wants to neuter a rooster, he can simply remove its comb and the rooster will automatically become infertile.

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MASEI

the word Hallelujah used to be said 123 times when reciting Hallel (see Rambam's Laws of Megillah and Chanukah 3:12–14), which the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Shabbos* 16:1) says corresponds to the 123 years of Aharon's life.

The Torah telling us that Aharon HaKohen died on Rosh Chodesh Av is the only example of the Torah telling us the calendar date of somebody's death (his "*yabrachheil*"). Perhaps, this was particularly important for us to know, because the month of Av is a time when we must focus on having loving and positive relationships with others Jews, as opposed to *sinas chinam*, and Aharon was the exemplar of love for others, and bringing them close to Torah as a manifestation of that love **אוהב את הבריות ומקרבת לתורה**.

Menashe before Efrayim?

For the sons of Yosef, for the tribe of Menashe... for the tribe of Binyamin... (Num. 34:23–24). *Techeiles Mordechai* (of Maharsham) explains that even though Efrayim is usually mentioned before Menashe when listing the tribes, here it makes sense that the opposite would be true. This is because Efrayim was more associated with Torah study (hence, that tribe produced Yehoshua—Moshe's prime disciple), while Menashe himself was the executor of Yosef's estate and was busier with worldly matters. Because of this difference between the two, Efrayim who was associated with Torah was blessed with Yaakov's right hand which represents success in Torah and the World to Come, while Menashe was blessed with his left hand which represents worldly success with riches and honor. Because of this paradigm, whenever the brothers are mentioned in a religious context (e.g., like bringing inaugural sacrifices in the Tabernacle or the travelling formation which represents God's kingship), Efrayim always comes before Menashe. However, here when it comes to the officers in charge of divvying up the Holy Land between the various tribes, this is an entirely worldly endeavor, and it makes more sense that the more worldly tribe, Menashe, would be mentioned before Efrayim. He also explains that this is why the Torah here puts Zevulun before Yissachar, even though in general the latter precedes the former; because Yissachar were engaged in Torah studies while Zevulun supported them.

We can offer another, more esoteric explanation of this phenomenon. The Torah tells us that Yosef named his son Menashe because Hashem made him "forget" (*nashani*) all his troubles from his father's house. *Maor VaShemesh* explains that Yosef's main struggle was to be able to come closer to Hashem even in Egypt, even when His existence and intervention in the world is not so obvious. Accordingly, when the Jews were on the cusp of entering the Holy Land, they too were entering a place where His existence and intervention is not so obvious (when compared to the desert where they experienced daily miracles with the Clouds of Glory and the manna). Because of this, to better equip the Jews with the ability to cope with that situation, Menashe is mentioned before Efrayim, because Menashe represents

Much of the material presented in Oneg! has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the Oneg! weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of Oneg! send an email to BKLAshul@gmail.com

A collection of fascinating material on the weekly parsha!

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff

PARSHAS MASEI

Yosef's success on that front which should serve as a precedent from which all the Jewish people can learn.

The Shema and Refuge

And the cities which you shall give to the Levites—the six cities of refuge which you shall give to the murderer fleeing there, and upon them you shall give forty-two cities (Num. 35:6). The Apter Rav (*Ohev Yisrael*) writes that the six cities of refuge allude to the six words of the first verse of Shema, and the forty-two Levitical cities allude to the forty-two words in the first paragraph of Shema (from **וְאֵהָבֵת** onwards). What does the city of refuge have to do with reading *Kriyas Shema*?

In the story of the Jews committing sexual misdeeds with the Midianite women, and the plague that struck them, the Torah says that the nation was crying (Num. 25:6). Targum Yonasan there says “they were crying and reading *Shema*”. Why? The *Damesek Eliezer* (Vishnitz) explains that the Talmud (*Eruvin* 19a) says that Avraham Avinu sits at the entrance to *gehinnom* and takes out Jews who were sent there, unless they were Jewish men who fornicated with non-Jewish women. The Talmud (*Brachos* 15b) further says that if one reads *Kriyas Shema* meticulously and is particular about pronouncing its letters, they will cool down *gehinnom* for him. Putting these two sources together, we see that a Jewish man who fornicated with a non-Jewish woman is damned to *gehinnom* and not even Avraham Avinu will save him. His only hope is if he reads *Kriyas Shema* properly, then they will cool down his hell experience a bit. For this reason, explains the Vishnitzer Rebbe, the Jews who illicitly fornicated with the Midianite women were reading *Kriyas Shema*, as they hoped it would cool off their eternal damnation. In essence, the lesson here is that even if a person has sinned, he can still tone down the ramifications of his sin by reading *Kriyas Shema* coming closer to Hashem.

In this vein, the Gerrer Rebbe *Beis Yisrael* explains that just as a person who spills another's blood has hope for himself and he is not eternally damned, but can escape to a city of refuge, so does a person who spills his own blood and “spiritually” killed himself through sin have hope and can fix himself by reading *Kriyas Shema*.

How long you in for?

until the death of the Kohen Gadol... (Num. 35:28). R. Ovadia Sforno explains that this exile is an atonement for an inadvertent sin. Because of this, since the degrees of inadvertency are not uniform, but might sometimes be closer to an accident and sometimes closer to something done on purpose, then the duration of the sentence given to the murderer is not uniform but depends on the death of Kohen Gadol which will always amount to a different amount of time. Making the duration of the sentence a function of the death of Kohen Gadol allows for Hashem to make sure that each murderer sits *for exactly the right amount of time* that He deems necessary.

Much of the material presented in Oneg! has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the Oneg! weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of Oneg! send an email to BKLAshul@gmail.com

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**PARSHAS MASEI**

Praying for the Kohen Gadol's survival

...for in his city of refuge he shall dwell, until the death of the Kohen Gadol, and after the death of the Kohen Gadol, the murderer will return to the land of his holding (Num. 35:28). The Talmud (*Makkos* 11a) says that the mothers of the Kohanim Gedolim would bring supplies to the murderers so that they would pray that their sons (i.e. the Kohanim Gedolim) would not die. Rabbi Yosef Chaim Baghdad (*Ben Yebovada* there) points out that it seems kind of funny that the mothers of the Kohanim Gedolim would seek out these murderers to bless their sons in the same way that people seek out *tzaddikim* to give them blessing. If they wanted a *bracha*, why wouldn't these ladies just go to a *tzaddik*, why did they have to go to murderers sitting cities of refuge?

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Baghdad answers that when the murderers who were stuck in cities of refuge prayed for the survival of the Kohanim Gedolim, this was a more meaningful and significant prayer than if anybody else would do so. Because when murderers would pray for the Kohanim Gedolim to live, this would show that they were willing to wish Kohen Gadol well even if that would cause their suffering to be prolonged, and were willing to stay even longer in their city of refuge as long as the Kohanim Gedolim get to live longer. When a person prays in such a way that he shows Hashem what he is willing to give up personally on behalf of another person, Hashem is more likely to answer that prayer because He too is willing to forgive and forgo, especially because He has nothing to lose by allowing the Kohen Gadol to live longer (while the murderer praying for that actually does have something to lose).

With this in mind, we can better understand the statement of the Talmud Yerushalmi (cited by *Nezer HaKodesh*) which says, "Do not take the blessing of one who loves you lightly". In light of the above, somebody who has reason to hate another person and still blesses him is a higher form of blessing, than the blessing of somebody who loves the person whom he blessed. One might think that such a blessing isn't all that valuable. Nonetheless, the Talmud warns that one should not take the blessing of the 'lover' lightly, as it too has great power to influence, even if not as great as a person who's blessing overcomes personal animus.

Don't mess up the Fruits of the Land

And you shall not defile the land in which I dwell inside it, for I am Hashem, who dwells within the Children of Israel (Num. 35:34). The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 208) cites the view of the *Smak* (= *Sefer Mitzvos Katan*) who discusses the proper wording of the blessing of *Al HaMichya* and says that some say that one should not say the words "and we shall eat her [i.e. the Holy Land's] fruits and we shall be satisfied from her good" because one should not desire the Holy Land on account of its fruits and other goods, but on account of our ability to fulfill the commandments which depend on the land. However, Rabbi Yoel Sirkes in the *Bach* (= *Bayis Chadash*) there finds this opinion astonishing, because he notes that the

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff**PARSHAS MASEI**

Holiness of the land is directly influenced by the Upper Holiness from Above which also affects the fruits of the land. He notes that this is why the Torah exhorts us not to defile the land, because defiling the land will have a determine effect on its fruits and other produce. Rather, Rabbi Sirkes argues that when we eat the fruits of the land, we ae being directly sustained by the holiness of the Holy Presence of Hashem which dwells in the land and that itself is a significant act which should be mentioned in the blessing. Indeed, the Talmud itself also discusses the spiritual dimension of eating the fruits of the land as the Mishnah (Sotah 48a) says: Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua: From the day the Holy Temple was destroyed, there is no day which is not cursed and the dew does not descend for beneficial purposes, and the **taste of fruits was taken away**.

Who is it “good” to marry?

This is the matter that Hashem commanded the daughters of Zelophchad saying, ‘to [whomever is] good in your eyes, you shall be wives, but [only] to the family of the tribe of their father shall they be as wives (Num. 36:6). In this passage, the Torah seems to outlaw marrying somebody from a different tribe in order to ensure that tribal territory will always still within that tribe. The Talmud (end of *Taanis*) relates that the days of Tu B’Av and Yom Kippur are the happiest days for the Jewish People, and explains that on Tu B’Av the tribes were given permission to intermarry with one another. The Tosafos explains that because of this, it became a Yom Tov. What does *Tosafos* mean that it became a Yom Tov; it’s not really a holiday in Halacha? *Yalkut HaGershuni* explains this passage by pointing to the wording of our verse which seems to contradict itself: First it says that the daughters of Tzelofchad could marry whoever was good in their eyes, but then it says that they have to marry somebody from their father’s tribe. And if they deemed somebody from another tribe “good” in their eyes, they would be forbidden from marrying him, so the term “good” in this context must be restricted to “good” from within a certain pool. Accordingly, when the tribes were later permitted to intermarry with each other starting from Tu B’Av, the definition of “good” became more inclusive and less restricted. Accordingly, explains *Yalkut HaGershuni*, when Tosafos write that Tu B’Av became a Yom Tov, this does not mean holiday, but literally means “A Day of Good”—the day on which the definition of “good” in terms of whom one can marry was expanded.