

Stollen Moments – Va’etchanan – July 24, 2021

PARASHA SUMMARY FROM WWW. REFORMJUDAISM.ORG

- Moses pleads with God to let him enter the Land of Israel with the people, but God once more refuses his request. (3:23–28)
- Moses orders the Children of Israel to pay attention and follow the laws given by God in order to be worthy of the land they are about to receive. (4:1–40)
- Specific areas of the land are set aside to serve as cities of refuge. (4:41–43)
- The covenant at Sinai and the Ten Commandments are recalled. Once again, the people are exhorted to heed God’s commandments. (5:1–30)
- Moses speaks the words of the Sh’ma, the credo of Judaism, and commands Israel to show their love for Adonai and keep God’s laws and ordinances. (6:1–25)
- Moses warns the people not to commit idolatry by worshiping the gods of the nations they will conquer in Israel. (7:1–11)

Deuteronomy Chapter 3

23 I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying, 24 "O Lord God, You who let Your servant see the first works of Your greatness and Your mighty hand, You whose powerful deeds no god in heaven or on earth can equal! 25 Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good hill country, and the Lebanon."

Bamidbar Rabbah 18:18

18 "It is enough for you, sons of Levi" (Numbers 16:7). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe, "You have struck with a stick, and you will be struck with that with which you struck. You said, "It is enough for you." And tomorrow you will hear, "It is enough for you" (Deuteronomy 3:26).

26 But the Lord was wrathful with me on your account and would not listen to me. The Lord said to me, "Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again! 27 Go up to the summit of Pisgah and gaze about, to the west, the north, the south, and the east. Look at it well, for you shall not go across yonder Jordan. 28 Give Joshua his instructions, and imbue him with strength and courage, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he shall allot to them the land that you may only see."

29 Meanwhile we stayed on in the valley near Beth-peor.

Chapter 4

1 And now, O Israel, give heed to the laws and rules that I am instructing you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. 2 You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you. 3 You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did in the matter of Baal-peor, that the Lord your God wiped out from among you every person who followed Baal-peor; 4 while you, who held fast to the Lord your God, are all alive today.

Sifrei Devarim 30:2

Variantly: He (Moses) said to them: "And we abode in the valley opposite Beth Peor." See the difference between you and me. How many prayers did I pray? Yet it was decreed upon me not to enter the land. But you angered Him for forty years, as it is written (Psalms 95:10) "Forty years I was angry with the generation. And, what is more, the greatest among you prostrated themselves to Peor, yet His right hand is stretched forward to accept penitents, so (Devarim 4:1) "now, O Israel, hearken to the statutes" — You are new; the past has been forgiven!

Sifra, Acharei Mot, Chapter 13 8

8) (Vayikra 18:3) "and in their statutes you shall not walk": What did Scripture leave unsaid (that this need be stated)? Is it not already written (Devarim 18:10) "There shall not be found among you one who passes his son or daughter through fire ... (Devarim 18:11) and a chover chaver, etc."? What, then, is the intent of "and in their statutes you shall not walk"? In their customs — those things that are established for them — such as theatres, circuses, and sports. R. Meir says: These are "the ways of the Emorites," which the sages enumerated. R. Yehudah b. Bethaira says: that you not preen yourself (to attract women), and not cultivate locks, and not wear the hair komi (a gentile fashion). And lest you say: "They have statutes and we have no statutes" — It is, therefore, written (Vayikra 18:9) "My judgments shall you do and My statutes you shall heed to walk in them; I am the L-rd your G d." — But there is still "hope" for the yetzer hara to reflect and say "But theirs are more beautiful than ours!" — It is, therefore, written (Devarim 4:6) "And you shall heed and you shall do. For this is your wisdom and your understanding."

5 See, I have imparted to you laws and rules, as the Lord my God has commanded me, for you to abide by in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. 6 Observe them faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, "Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people." 7 For what great nation is there that has a god so close at hand as is the Lord our God whenever we call upon Him? 8 Or what great nation has laws and rules as perfect as all this Teaching that I set before you this day?

9 But take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your mind as long as you live. And make them known to your children and to your children's children: 10 The day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to Me, "Gather the people to Me that I may let them hear My words, in order that they may learn to revere Me as long as they live on earth, and may so teach their children." 11 You came forward and stood at the foot of the mountain. The mountain was ablaze with

flames to the very skies, dark with densest clouds. 12 The Lord spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words but perceived no shape — nothing but a voice. 13 He declared to you the covenant that He commanded you to observe, the Ten Commandments; and He inscribed them on two tablets of stone. 14 At the same time the Lord commanded me to impart to you laws and rules for you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy.

15 For your own sake, therefore, be most careful — since you saw no shape when the Lord your God spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire — 16 not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman, 17 the form of any beast on earth, the form of any winged bird that flies in the sky, 18 the form of anything that creeps on the ground, the form of any fish that is in the waters below the earth. 19 And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them. These the Lord your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven; 20 but you the Lord took and brought out of Egypt, that iron blast furnace, to be His very own people, as is now the case.

Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:4:1

(Ibid. 4) "You shall not make for yourself an idol (lit., "a carving)": I might think that he may not make one that projects but he may make one that is flat. It is, therefore, written "any likeness." I might think that he may not make a flat one, but that he may make (an idol of) a planting. It is, therefore, written (Devarim 16:25) "You shall not plant for yourself an asheirah." I might think that he may not plant one, but that he may make one of wood. It is, therefore, written (Ibid.) "any wood." I might think that he may not make one of wood, but that he may make one of stone. It is, therefore, written (Leviticus 26:1) "And a covering stone, etc." I might think that he may not make one of stone, but that he may make one of silver. It is, therefore, written (Exodus 20:20) "gods of silver." I might think that he may not make one of silver, but that he may make one of gold. It is, therefore, written (Ibid.) "and gods of gold." I might think that he may not make one of gold, but that he may make one of copper or tin or lead. It is, therefore, written (Exodus 34:13) "Molten gods you shall not make for yourself." I might think that he may not make for himself the likeness of all these but that he may make one of any form. It is, therefore, written (Devarim 4:16) "Lest you corrupt yourselves and make ... of any form." I might think that he may not make one of any form, (of human being), but that he may make one of the likeness of an animal, beast, or bird. It is, therefore, written (Ibid. 17) "the figure of any beast, etc." I might think that he may not make the likeness of all of these, but that he may make the likeness of fish, hoppers, reptiles, and creeping things. It is, therefore, written (Ibid. 19) "any thing that creeps on the ground." I might think that he may not make the likeness of sun, moon, stars, and constellations. It is, therefore written (Ibid. 19) "And lest you lift your eyes to the heavens, etc." I might think that he may not make the likeness of any of these, but he may make the likeness of angels, cherubs, ofanim and chashmalim (angelic entities). It is, therefore, written (Ibid. 39) "in the heavens." If "in the heavens," I might think that he may not make the likeness (only) of sun, moon, and stars. It is, therefore, written (Ibid.) "above" — neither the likeness of cherubs or ofanim. I might think that he may not make the likeness of all these, but he may make the likeness of the depths or of darkness. It is, therefore, written (Ibid. 18) "which is in the waters beneath the earth." To include reflected images. These are the words of R. Akiva. Others say: To include shavririm (water creatures). So far did the Holy One Blessed be He pursue the yetzer hara (the evil inclination) to give it no pretext for permissiveness (in this area).

21 Now the Lord was angry with me on your account and swore that I should not cross the Jordan and enter the good land that the Lord your God is assigning you as a heritage. 22 For I must die in this land; I shall not cross the Jordan. But you will cross and take possession of that good land. 23 Take care, then, not to forget the covenant that the Lord your God concluded with you, and not to make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness, against which the Lord your God has enjoined you. 24 For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, an impassioned God.

Bamidbar Rabbah 21:16

16 Another interpretation of (Numb. 27:16) "Let the Lord, appoint": A parable: A king saw an orphan woman [and] sought to take her for him as a wife. He sent to seek her. She said, "I am not worthy to marry the king." He sent to seek her seven times, but she did not allow it. In the end she married him. After a time, the king was angry with her and sought to divorce her. She said, "I did not seek to be married to you; you sought me. Since this is so and you have decreed to divorce me and to take another, do not do to that one like what you did to me." So is it with the Holy One, blessed be He: R. Samuel the son of Nahmani said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, tried for seven days to persuade Moses from the midst of the burning bush, but Moses replied, (in Exod. 4:13), 'Send please, whomever you will send'; (ibid. 4:10) 'I am not a man of words, neither yesterday nor the day before.' This indicates seven days. After time, the Holy One, blessed be He persuaded him; and he went as His agent; and He did all of those miracles through him. In the end, He said to him (in Numb. 20:12), 'You shall not bring.' Moses said, 'Master of the world, (as in Deut. 3:24), "You who let Your servant see the first works of Your greatness, etc." Since this is so [and] You have decreed against me, do not do like what You did to me to the one that will go in. Rather (as in Numb. 27:17), 'Who shall go out before them and come in before them.'" The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, (in Numb. 27:18) "Take Joshua bin Nun." And Moses did [it] with a generous eye, as stated (Prov. 22:9), "The generous man is blessed." A parable: A king said to one of his household, "Give so and so a seah of wheat." He went and gave him two seah. He said to him, "One seah is from the king and one seah is from me." So did the Holy One, blessed be He say to Moses (in Numb. 27:18), "And lay your hand upon him" – one hand. What did he do? (In Numb 27:23) "He laid his hands upon him and commissioned him," to fulfill that which is stated (Prov. 22:9), "The generous man is blessed." Therefore (as in Prov. 27:18), "He who tends a fig tree will enjoy its fruit." And why is the Torah compared to a fig tree? Since [the fruit of] most trees – the olive tree, the grapevine, the date palm – is gathered [all] at once, but the fig tree is gathered a little [at a time]. And so too is the Torah. Today he studies a little and tomorrow he studies much; as it is not taught in a year, nor in two. (Numb. 27:18) "A man with the spirit of God with him": Since you said (in Numb. 27:16), "'The God of the spirits of all flesh,' since You know each and every one, one should be appointed who knows how to proceed with each and every one of them according to his temperament"; [so then (in Numb. 27:18, cont.),] "and lay your hand upon him," like one who lights a candle from a candle. (Numb 27:20) "Invest him with your majesty," like one who pours from one vessel to another vessel. Concerning that which I said to you (in Numb. 36:9), "So the inheritance will not move around from one tribe to another," this glory will not move from the house of your father, as even Joshua who will arise in your place (according to Numb. 27:19), "shall stand in front of Elazar the priest" (nephew of Moses).