

may be annulled retroactively. This is in reality the basis for the famous and moving Kol Nidrei prayer that ushers in the holy day of Yom Kippur. We cannot ask for Divine forgiveness if we are yet burdened with unfulfilled commitments and pledges. However, there are limitations on the power of the Jewish court to annul vows and commitments. A vow or pledge made publicly is not capable of being annulled in most instances. There are other exceptions to the possibility of annulment of vows retroactively. An entire tractate of the Talmud, Nedarim, is devoted to the complexity of this subject. It is one of the “regular” tractates that form the basic Talmud curriculum in the yeshivot of the world.

The name of this week’s parsha is Matot - the tribes. Moshe speaks to the heads of the tribes of Israel and instructs them regarding the laws of vows and oral commitments. Why is this the only place in the Torah that the laws are given specifically to the heads of the tribes? Perhaps it is a lesson that leaders have to be doubly careful in their words of promises and commitments. We are well aware that in the election campaigns that are currently mounted in the Western democratic world and here in Israel as well, the words of the candidates must be greatly discounted. People run on a certain platform of expressed views and commitments and once elected, often completely disregard their publicly stated pledges and policies.

Minyan Schedule

Erev Shabbat Parashat Matot
Candle lighting 18/07/14 4.48 pm
Kabbalat Shabbat (Mizrachi) 4.58 pm

Shabbat Parashat Matot
Shacharit 19/06/14 9.15 am
Children’s Service 10.00 am
Mincha 4.46 pm
Shabbat ends 5.46 pm

Erev Shabbat Parashat Masei
Candle lighting 25/07/14 4.52 pm
Kabbalat Shabbat (Mizrachi) 5.02 pm

Announcements

**Kiddush is sponsored by
The Synagogue**

**Mazal Tov to Jack and
Miriam Stein and family
on the birth of another
grandson. Son and to
Rabbi David and Rivka
Stein, New York**

If the Torah holds a private individual to his word, then how much more so public officials and elected leaders should be held to those statements which form the basis for their election victory. Therefore, Moshe first instructs the heads of the tribes, the leaders of Israel, regarding these laws of the Torah. Only by fulfilling one’s words can trust and confidence be achieved between the public and its leaders. *Rabbi Berel Wein and torah.org.*

Or Chadash

קהילת אור חדש

WEEKLY BULLETIN

Shabbat Parashat Matot

21 Tamuz, 5774, 19 July, 2014

Torah reading: Stone Chumash page 900,
Haftarah page 1192.

President Jonathan Erlich

Rabbi-in-residence Rabbi Franklin

Consulting Rabbi R David Freedman
Dvar Torah

War and Peace

Rabbi Marc D. Angel

War is ugly. It has been a scourge of humanity from time immemorial and it continues to plague humanity today. War entails fighting and killing enemies. It entails a vast commitment of resources to mobilize and arm one’s forces and to strengthen one’s defenses. It involves heavy financial, social and psychological costs. It entails casualties and loss of life. War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook taught: “We must see life in two dimensions, as

it is, and as it should be. Absolute righteousness is always rooted in how things should be, but provisional righteousness which touches more on acting in the present, is built on how things actually are, the two are connected, like alternating horizons on a long journey.” (Igrot Ha Reiyah, I94).

How things should be: peaceful, with love prevailing among humankind. How things are: warlike, with hatred and violence spreading like wildfire. How are we to deal with this dichotomy?

We are to maintain our commitment to absolute righteousness, peace, a world of love and harmony. At the same time, we must deal with harsh realities with strength



and courage. Even while engaging in ugly warfare, our dreams need to be squarely focused on peace.

This week's Torah portion tells of the war between the Israelites and the Midianites. Moses calls upon the Israelites to gather men to go to battle. Rashi comments that the men to be chosen as warriors must be "tsadikim," righteous people. At first glance, this is a strange comment. One would think that the men to be chosen as soldiers would be selected on the basis of their physical prowess, their courage, their skill with weaponry. What does righteousness have to do with warfare?

I think Rashi's comment precisely reflects the classic Jewish view of warfare. Those who go to battle must not only be capable warriors, but must be righteous. They must keep the ideals of peace, compassion, and morality always in mind. Each soldier needs to operate on two dimensions: how things should be, and how things actually are.

As I write these lines, Israel is engaged in an ugly war. Hamas terrorists have fired many hundreds of missiles at Israeli cities and towns. Their hatred of Israel knows

no bounds; they intentionally aim at Israeli civilians; they place their own civilians as "human shields" in the face of Israeli retaliatory strikes. The Israeli Defense Forces have targeted Hamas arms caches, missile launch pads, terrorist leaders. Israel seeks to destroy Hamas's capacity to fire missiles into Israel. Israel tries to avoid civilian casualties, going so far as to telephone Gazans in the danger zone and to notify them by leaflets of impending attacks in their area. In spite of these Israeli warnings, Gazan civilians are hurt or killed.

Some world "leaders" and media figures are quick to attack Israel for its attacks which are not "proportional." One wonders what a "proportional" response ought to be when two-thirds of the population of one's country is under constant threat of missile attacks. Would any other country tolerate an onslaught of missiles aimed at their civilian centers of population? Wouldn't every responsible nation attempt to crush the capabilities of the enemy? Indeed, wouldn't it be highly irresponsible and immoral of a nation not to defend its citizens who are being barraged by enemy missiles?

The greatness of Israel and its Defense Forces is not only in their incredible courage, power, intelligence and resilience. The greatness of Israel and its Defense Forces is precisely in striving to be "tsadikim" even during warfare. Anyone who knows anything at all about Israel, knows that this is a country that wants peace, that strives for peace, that has sacrificed incredibly to attain peace. But in spite of Israel's desire for peace, its enemies preach hatred, violence, terrorism, and the most vicious anti-Israel, anti-Jewish propaganda.

War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer. But we must view life in two dimensions: as it is, and as it should be. As it is: we must fight in order to maintain ourselves and our nation. As it should be: we are fighting for a righteous, loving and peaceful world. *Rabbi Marc D. Angel and the Institute of Jewish Ideas and Ideals.*

A Word About Pledges Rabbi Berel Wein

A person's word should be that person's bond. In Jewish law, oral agreements when properly witnessed at the time of the agreement are as binding as any written contract. The Torah teaches us that "everything that comes forth from one's mouth requires that person's fulfillment of his declaration." Commitments,

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We have operated since 1995. During the year we arrange special activities including: learning, shiur/lecture series and social events.

such as vows, are viewed very seriously in Jewish law and the penalties associated with breaking one's commitment and/or vow are quite severe. Because of this, King Solomon stated in Kohelet that "it is better not to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill that vow." Due to the seriousness of vows, it has become customary in Jewish life for one to qualify any commitment that one may make, no matter how sincere and noble that commitment may be, with the Hebrew words bli neder - this is not to be construed as a vow. In order to extricate people from vows already made, the halacha has provided a legal mechanism that can retroactively annul vows. This mechanism is founded on the principle that the vow was made in error, under an erroneous assumption that circumstances would allow the vow to be fulfilled. However, now, when it is apparent that because of changing or unforeseen circumstances, the person is unable to execute his vow, then the vow

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