

## SIDRA OF THE WEEK: מטות

1. This Sidra starts with the Laws of Vows and Promises. The Torah commands that anyone who is old enough, or mature enough, to understand the importance of keeping one's word is obliged to carry out whatever one has undertaken to do. In the case of a young girl in her father's house, her vows come under the authority of her father, and likewise those vows of a married woman which affect him too can be vetoed by her husband on the day that he hears of them. (*See chart for more details.*) In certain unforeseeable circumstances, a person's vows or promises can be cancelled by a Rabbi, but generally speaking, "a man's word is his bond." Interestingly, the Torah stresses a number of times that to profane one's word is an offence not so much against one's fellow man but more an offence against HaShem, and requires His pardon.
2. HaShem commands Mosheh to organize the war of vengeance against Midyon before he dies. This is to avenge the honour of the Jewish People who died through the immoral scheme of the Midyanites to destroy the Jewish People. Immediately, Mosheh orders the Jewish People into battle to avenge the honour of HaShem which had been challenged by the Midyanites' plot against HaShem's Chosen People.
3. The Midyanites are defeated — without any loss at all to the Jewish People — and Billom ben Be'or, the evil prophet, is killed, as are the five kings of Midyon. The Midyanite women who played a part in the plot are also put to the sword.
4. The Torah lists the booty taken in this battle which now came into our possession. Mosheh our Teacher explains to us how these Midyanite food vessels and utensils are to be thoroughly cleaned ("Kashered") and immersed in a Mikveh before being used by Jewish people. Interestingly enough, the booty taken in the battles recently fought against Si'chon and Og did not require any immersion in a Mikveh when they passed into our possession — all that was required was a thorough cleaning process. Only when a food vessel or utensil comes newly into Jewish ownership does it need to be immersed in a Mikveh. (If it was actually used, it would have to be "Kashered" first to remove any *treif* (the opposite of kosher) particles and only after that is it immersed in a Mikveh). The fact that the Dinnim of newly acquired vessels were taught only now (and not after the earlier battles with Si'chon and Og) seems to indicate that Mosheh our Teacher considered the things of Eretz Kenaan and its inhabitants as things that were always in Jewish ownership. Therefore those vessels did not need to be immersed in a Mikveh — if anything, they would need only to be cleaned of any traces of *treif* food. Only after the battle with Midyon, whose territory did not form part of Eretz

Yisroel as such, was it necessary to teach about “Kashering” and immersion in a Mikveh.

5. HaShem commands how the spoils of war are to be divided up among all the people, and how much is to be consecrated to the Mishkan of HaShem. Shortly afterwards, when those who were appointed as the officers of the fighting men ascertained that not even one man had fallen during the fighting, they offered an additional amount from the spoils to the Mishkan as a token of their gratitude for HaShem’s protection during this hazardous time. (These arrangements in fact became the pattern for the future.)
6. The Sidra continues with the request of the people of the Tribes of Gad and Re’uven to settle in the pasture lands on the east side of the River Yardayn, rather than pass over into Eretz Yisroel proper. These lands, taken in the battles against Si’chon and Og, were lush pasture lands and Gad and Re’uven had much sheep and cattle from the spoils of the recent war against Midyon. But Mosheh our Teacher detects in this request a number of disturbing faults and he rebukes them for their request. Firstly, by asking to settle straightaway, the Tribes of Gad and Re’uven would discourage the rest of the Jewish People from wanting to go on into Eretz Yisroel proper — their request could be construed as a fear of battles to come and weariness to continue. Secondly, if the Tribes of Gad and Re’uven were willing to take their portion here, they showed that the holy nature of Eretz Yisroel proper didn’t count with them for very much. They seemed to imply that the main purpose of HaShem giving us Eretz Yisroel was to provide us with a homeland and if we can find any place that would serve this purpose, then it will do just as well. In this respect, they overlooked the special and holy properties of Eretz Yisroel, and seemed to deny the whole concept of our being a holy People in a holy Land. Thirdly, they seemed to be more concerned with their possessions than with their wives and children — they seemed to place them first — and this is not the correct order of priorities.
7. The people of Gad and Re’uven accept the rebuke of Mosheh our Teacher. They promise that they will fight at the side of their brethren until the Jewish People are settled in the Land, and so Mosheh agrees to their request. On condition that they will help the Jewish People to take possession of Eretz Yisroel — just as the Jewish People had helped to take the lands on the east of the Jordan — Mosheh gives Gad and Re’uven these lands as their portion. (Many laws of “Conditions” are derived from this episode.) And so, they build stockades and towns for their people, and pens for their sheep, and they settle in the region to the east of the River Yardayn.

**For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra מטות please go to HAFTORAHS.**