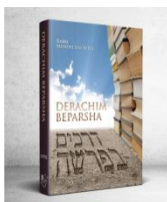


דרכים בפרשה מטות-מסעי

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ויקחו את כל השלל ואת כל המלקוח באדם ובבהמה *They gathered all the spoil and all the booty, human and animal.*

When the Yidden returned from the war, they brought back all of the spoils to Moshe Rabbeinu. Rashi explains: **מגיד שהיו כשרים וצדיקים, ולא נחשדו על הגזל לשלח יד בבזה שלא ברשות**—This teaches that they were upright and righteous, and no one was suspected of taking even a single item from the spoils without permission.

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l (*Darash Moshe* vol. 2) wonders: why is there any discussion of *gezel*—stealing—when we're talking about spoils of war? As unsettling as war may be, one cannot call spoils "stolen." A simple *pshat* may be that the spoils belonged collectively to Klal Yisroel, and the Torah is telling us that no individual took anything for themselves—thus avoiding stealing from the rest of the nation.

But Rav Moshe offers something deeper. There are different forms of *gezel*. One can steal from another person—but one can also steal from HaShem. How is that possible, if everything already belongs to Him?

The Gemara in *Brachos* gives an example: if one eats without making a *bracha*, it's as if he has stolen from HaShem. What does that mean?

Rav Moshe explains: life itself is a gift. Every moment, every breath we take in this world is a divine deposit—something that cannot be purchased or extended. When our time is up, there won't be an extra breath available, no matter the price.

Imagine a parent gives a child twenty dollars to buy a few necessary items from the store. Instead, the child spends it all on bubble gum. True, the child had free choice to do so—but that doesn't change the reality: the money was given for a specific purpose. Spending it otherwise is misappropriation—it's theft.

The same is true of time. We may choose how to spend it—but it was given to us for a reason. When we squander our time, wasting it or using it in ways that serve no purpose—or worse, using it for things we shouldn't—that too is stealing. Even a beautiful *bracha* made in a moment that's being misused can become part of that theft.

Time may be "ours," but only in the sense that we have free will. The moment we misuse it, we become like that child who came home with a bag of candy instead of what the family needed.

Rav Moshe adds a striking point. After all the *viduyim* we cry out during *Ne'ila*, the final confession we say is **למען נחדל מעושק ידינו**—"so that we may refrain from the injustice in our hands." On the surface, this refers to theft or not paying a worker on time. But if so, why is this the *last* thing we say on Yom Kippur?

Based on Rav Moshe's approach, it makes perfect sense. As Yom Kippur winds down and the final moments slip away, we cry out that we misused our time. We confess that we didn't spend this past year wisely, and we commit to doing better in the one ahead.

There's another angle too. Sometimes we look at others and feel jealous. "If only I had what they have..." or "Why do they have that and not me?" Feelings of resentment, entitlement, or competitiveness may creep in. "If I just angle things this way, maybe I can outdo them..."

That mindset, too, is a form of *gezel*. Not stealing from others—but denying the role HaShem plays in giving each person exactly what they need. When we don't accept our portion, we're not just being ungrateful—we're pushing against Divine justice.

איזהו עשיר? השמח בחלקו. A truly wealthy person isn't the one with the most, but the one who finds joy in what HaShem gave him. That's real wealth—and that's honesty.

The Sfas Emes makes a fascinating observation in the opening of Parshas Maasei: **יכתב משה את-מוצאיהם למסעיהם על-פי ה' ואלה מסעיהם למוצאיהם**—Moshe recorded their journeys, stop by stop, at HaShem's command.

There were forty-two encampments—some positive, some marked by sin and failure (see Rashi). But why list the negative ones? Why include the places where we stumbled?

The Sfas Emes teaches: each of us goes through many stations in life. Some are uplifting; some are painful. Some feel like failure. But when we stay strong through difficulty, those moments become *zechuyos* as well. They, too, come with us.

The word **מוצאיהם** can also mean "to take out." Each *masa*, each station, is an opportunity to bring something out of it—some growth, some reward, some eternal gain. When we face disappointment and don't break, that moment becomes part of our reward in *Olam Haba*.

And sometimes, the very things we didn't have in this world—the longings we surrendered to HaShem's will—become our deepest portion in Gan Eden.

Good Shabbos, **מרדכי אפפלי**