

Vessel as a Parable – Matot-Masei

[Shiurim Main Menu](#)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹעֶזֶר הַכֹּהֵן אֶל אַנְשֵׁי הַצִּבָּא הַבָּאִים לְמַלְחָמָה זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה. אַךְ אֶת הַזָּהָב וְאֶת הַכֶּסֶף אֶת הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֶת הַבְּרֹזֶל אֶת הַבְּדִיל וְאֶת הָעֹפֶרֶת. כָּל דְּבַר אֲשֶׁר יָבֵא בְּאֵשׁ תַּעֲבִירוּ בְּאֵשׁ וְטָהַר אַךְ בְּמִי נִדְּהָ יִתְחַטָּא וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָבֵא בְּאֵשׁ תַּעֲבִירוּ בַּמַּיִם. (במדבר כה, יב)

A few psukim before, we read about HKB"H commanding Moshe to exact vengeance on Midyan for their part in causing Am Yisrael to sin at Ba'al Peor. This is to be Moshe's last task as a leader before his death. You would think that Moshe would drag his heels as long as possible to prolong his life. But no, Moshe diligently and hurriedly set about fulfilling HKB"H's command.

In this war the Torah describes how Am Yisrael killed all the males of Midyan, including the Midyanite kings, one of whom was Balak (he is named Tzur in the passuk ח, במדבר לא, תרגום יונתן, Hang on, wasn't Balak the king of Moav?

Two parshiyot ago the passuk says וַיִּבְלַק בֶּן צְפוּר מֶלֶךְ לְמוֹאָב בְּעֵת הַהוּא (במדבר כב, ד), on which Rashi (ibid.) asks "What does it mean בְּעֵת הַהוּא?" and answers that Balak was actually a Midyanite and not from Moav. However, after Am Yisrael defeated and killed Sichon, Moav decided to elect Balak their king because his powers of magic were great, second only to Sichon.

In this battle Bilam also perished. The Targum Yonatan (ח, במדבר לא, ח) says that Bilam used his magical powers to fly up into the sky to escape the wrath of Pinchas, who intended to kill him. When Pinchas saw this, he uttered the Shem HaMeforash and flew up into the sky after Bilam. Pinchas grabbed Bilam by the hair and dragged him back down to earth and drew his sword to kill him. Bilam implored Pinchas to spare his life, promising to never again curse Am Yisrael. Pinchas replied "You Bilam are in fact (a gilgul of) Lavan Ha'Arami who tried to kill Yaakov Avinu. You then went down to Egypt to try wipe out his descendants. When Am Yisrael left Egypt, you provoked Amalek into attacking Am Yisrael. And now you were hired to curse and destroy Am Yisrael. After you saw that you failed and that HKB"H did not accept your evil utterances, you advised Balak to take his Midyanite women and cause Am Yisrael to sin, resulting in 24,000 deaths. You cannot be allowed to live". Pinchas drew his sword and killed Bilam.

In this war with Midyan, Am Yisrael captured and returned with many spoils – women, children, livestock and possessions. Moshe and Elazar HaKohen (who was now the Kohen Gadol after his father Aharon died) went out

to greet the army of Am Yisrael returning from the war. When Moshe saw that they had spared the women he was angry. "How could you let the women live? It was they who made Am Yisrael sin at Ba'al Peor, causing the plague that wiped out so many in Am Yisrael".

Moshe commanded them to kill all the male children and also all women who had not had sexual relations, leaving only the virgin female children.

It is easy to understand why Moshe wanted to kill all the Midyanite women who caused so many deaths in Am Yisrael, but why kill all the male *children*?

We don't fully grasp the catastrophe of Ba'al Peor. In addition to the 24,000 in Am Yisrael who died in the plague, Rashi (במדבר כה, ה) says that the 88,000 judges in Am Yisrael (שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים, שָׂרֵי מֵאוֹת, שָׂרֵי חֲמֵשִׁים וְשָׂרֵי עֶשְׂרֵת) each executed two offenders in Am Yisrael, making a total of 176,000. Add to that the 24,000 who died in the plague, makes a grand total of 200,000 men who died at Ba'al Peor. That is a *third* of the population of Am Yisrael!

The infiltration of this sin in Am Yisrael was so deep, that even after they waged war with Midyan, they didn't kill the women, until Moshe commanded them to. Moshe wanted to exonerate Am Yisrael so that they would be clean from this terrible sin without any suspicion at all. The Kli Yakar (במדבר לא, יז) says that the fact that they left the women alive could cast doubt on Am Yisrael that they kept them alive because they had either previously sinned with them, or intended to in the future. They might have even had children with them from these forbidden relationships. Therefore, Moshe commanded them to kill both the women who had sexual relations and the male children and leave only the female children who had not had any relations. They determined this by parading the females in front of the צִיץ הַקֹּדֶשׁ of the Kohen Gadol. Those who had relations, their face went pale and those who didn't their face went red (Targum Yonatan, ibid.)

The reason for killing the male children but leaving the female children alive is to ensure that Midyan would not ever reconstitute their army in the future, the male children growing up and taking revenge for their parents. The female children converted and became part of Am Yisrael.

The Sulam's perush on the Zohar HaKadosh (אות רכג) says an amazing thing. Balak, who was from Midyan, was שָׂל יִתְרוֹ, מִבְּנֵי בְנֵי יִתְרוֹ, a grandson of Yitro. After Matan Torah, Yitro joins up with Am Yisrael in the Midbar and converts and then returns to Midyan to try convert his people as well. We see from this that his mission was unsuccessful and the people of Midyan clung to their avodah zarah.

It is interesting to contrast Pinchas, also a grandson of Yitro, born from one of Yitro's daughters who decided to cling to Am Yisrael, with Balak, another

grandson of Yitro who went in the opposite direction. In this week's parsha we have the intersection between these two progeny of Yitro.

This was not a simple military campaign - it was a war of vengeance and was intended as a deterrent against anyone who wanted to cause harm to Am Yisrael. Apparently Am Yisrael never managed to completely wipe out Midyan in this war. They were a nomadic people and during the war, some must have been travelling in distant places. The fact is that almost 200 years later, Midyan managed to multiply and again pose a threat to Am Yisrael in the time of the Shoftim.

All of the above is a background to the topic of our shiur.

After Moshe tells them to kill all the women etc. above, he tells the soldiers how to purify themselves after coming into contact with dead bodies during the war.

We then find a very "strange" passuk.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֶל אַנְשֵׁי הַצָּבָא הַבָּאִים לְמִלְחָמָה זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה (במדבר לא, כא)

Elazar HaKohen then proceeds to tell the soldiers of Am Yisrael how to kasher all the vessels that they captured as spoils of war.

Until now it was Moshe doing all the talking, suddenly we switch to Elazar HaKohen, and this is not some victory "speech" to the soldiers, Elazar is paskening halacha to them, he is giving them a shiur on the halachot of kashering keilim. In fact, all our halachot in the Shulchan Aruch regarding kashering of treif keilim are *derived from these psukkim* that Elazar HaKohen taught to Am Yisrael.

We have a halacha meforeshet - כָּל הַמוֹרָה הַלֵּכָה בְּפָנָי רַבּוֹ חֵיב מִיתָה - a talmid is forbidden to pasken a halacha in the presence of his rav. How is it possible that Elazar, who was a talmid of Moshe Rabbeinu suddenly starts paskening halacha in front of Moshe ... and nothing happens to him!

The Sifri (ibid.) gives two reasons.

The first is that we read above that Moshe was angry with the soldiers returning from the war, that they let the Midyanite women live. As a result of him becoming angry, Moshe forgot the halacha and Elazar had to convey it to the soldiers. This is the third time mentioned in the Torah that Moshe became angry and forgot the halacha. The first is when Moshe became angry with Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon for not eating the korban חֶטְאֵת inside the Mishkan (ויקרא י, יז). The second is when Moshe became angry with Am Yisrael at Mei

Meriva (י, במדבר כ) and here in our parsha is the third. The Sifri says that as a result of Moshe becoming angry, he forgot the halacha and therefore Elazar had to relay it.

The second reason given by the Sifri is that Moshe gave *permission* to Elazar HaKohen to teach the halacha of kashering keilim, because he knew that he would soon die and Elazar would continue to serve as the Kohen Gadol together with Yehoshua. Moshe wanted to prevent Am Yisrael from later challenging Elazar HaKohen "When Moshe was alive you never spoke a word and now suddenly you have something to say?"

Regardless of whether the reason is the first or the second, the Sifri ends by saying that Elazar quoted the halacha in *Moshe's* name זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' את משה. When we teach something that is not our own, that we heard/learned from someone else, we are obliged to credit the source (מגילה טו). The Gemara brings the example of Esther quoting in the name of Mordechai (אסתר ב, כב).

Another question is the following. Just before Elazar relays the halacha of kashering keilim instead of Moshe, we read about Moshe paskening halacha about who to kill from the spoils of Midyan and how the soldiers need to purify themselves. If Moshe's becoming angry made him forget the halacha, why was it *only the halacha of kashering keilim* that he forgot and not the halacha of what to do with the women/children of Midyan and the halacha of purifying the soldiers? Those halachot he *did not* forget when he became angry?

Let us briefly dive into some of the halachot of kashering keilim and obtain some insight to enable us to answer some of the above questions.

As stated above, all the halachot of kashering keilim are derived from our parsha and the keilim which were spoils from the war with Midyan. However, this is not the first time Am Yisrael waged war in the desert and accumulated "spoils". Before the war with Midyan, Am Yisrael fought two more wars, with Sichon and Og. The passuk tells us that from those battles רק הבהמה בַּזְּנוּ לָנוּ וְשָׁלַל הָעָרִים (דברים ב, לה). It appears from this passuk that in those wars they only took spoils from the animals, not the keilim. However, the Ramban (במדבר לא, כג), says no, they took spoils of keilim as well! וְשָׁלַל הָעָרִים includes keilim. So why do we not learn הַלְכוֹת הַכֶּשֶׁר כְּלִים from the spoils of Sichon and Og?

The Ramban says that there is a fundamental difference in these wars. In the wars of Sichon and Og, Am Yisrael conquered land that was *part of the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael*, therefore Am Yisrael inherited everything from the previous inhabitants, וּבָתִּים מְלֵאִים כָּל טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא מְלֵאתָ (דברים ו, יא), they got everything ready-made – houses, fields, cities keilim etc. Therefore, the keilim conquered from Sichon and Og were not "spoils of war", they essentially *belonged* to Am Yisrael already, both the keilim and the isurim that were

absorbed in them, which then automatically and magically became מוּתָר and they didn't have to be kashered, (חולין יז, ע"א). However, in the war with Midyan, Am Yisrael did not inherit the land of Midyan, so the keilim were not essentially theirs, they belonged to the goyim, including all the forbidden isurim absorbed in them, therefore they had to be kashered.

The Tosfot (הדר זקנים שם לא, כג) does not agree with the Ramban and raises pertinent questions on the Ramban's shita (which are reconciled by the Minchat Chinuch 'עוד', ו, תקכו), but we won't get into that resolution here.

The passuk in our parsha above lists six types of metal keilim – זָהָב, כֶּסֶף, נְחֹשֶׁת, בְּרֹזֶל, בְּדִיל וְעַפְרַת, gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead. One type of kli is glaringly absent, the most common of them all – clay/porcelain? One possible answer that this is not included in the list is because you *cannot kasher* a כְּלִי חֶרֶס (according to most opinions). I heard another, more practical reason from HaRav Binyamin Zimmerman שליט"א, that the soldiers didn't bring back כְּלִי חֶרֶס, only the more *valuable* vessels made out of metal. כְּלִי חֶרֶס in ancient times was the closest you could get to חֶרֶס - they had no real value and were not regarded as spoils.

The passuk teaches us the two primary methods of kashering keilim, כָּל דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יָבִיא בְּאֵשׁ תַּעֲבִירוּ בְּאֵשׁ anything that can withstand the heat of intense fire, must be subjected to fire. וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָבִיא בְּאֵשׁ תַּעֲבִירוּ בַּמַּיִם any keilim that cannot withstand intense fire must be kashered using water. These are the sources for הַגְּעָלָה and לִיבוּן.

לִיבוּן is heating the vessel with intense heat (like a blow torch) which practically *obliterates* any isur absorbed in the kli. הַגְּעָלָה is boiling the kli (in a huge pot of water – like those used to kasher keilim for Pesach), which *extracts* the isur absorbed in the kli.

The intricacies related to the halachot of הַכְּשֵׁר כֵּלִים are numerous and detailed and beyond the scope of this shiur. Essentially, the process involves two distinct stages, סוּר מֵרַע and עֲשֵׂה טוֹב. You first have to kasher/remove the isur from the kli (סוּר מֵרַע), but that is insufficient. The passuk adds אַךְ בְּמֵי נְדָה יִתְחַטָּא, it is not enough to remove the isur, we also have to "tovel" the kli in the mikva. You also have to elevate the kli to a status of קְדוּשָׁה before a Jew may use it (עֲשֵׂה טוֹב). This applies both to treif kelim acquired from a goy and also brand-new keilim made by a goy – they both need טְבִילַת כֵּלִים in the mikva to give them קְדוּשָׁה. HKB"H wants Am Yisrael to use keilim that have a status of holiness – both in the Mikdash and *also in the home*. A person's table is equivalent to a Mizbeach! (מנחות צו, ע"א).

Now that we understand the underlying principle of הַקְשֵׁר בְּלִים, we gain an insight into our episode above - the division of relaying the halachot between Moshe and Elazar.

If we say that Moshe's anger precluded him from relaying the halacha, then it should have been for *all* the halachot – which Midyanim survivors to kill, which to leave alive, how the soldiers should purify themselves and how to kasher the keilim. However, we see that Moshe did not "forget" all the halachot. Moshe did teach the soldiers all the above halachot *excepting* for those related to the keilim.

Becoming angry did not make Moshe forget the halachot of *national importance* – exacting vengeance on the Midyanite women, killing the male children so that they would not grow up and reconstitute the Midyanite army, leaving the female children alive – to convert them and make them part of Am Yisrael (women cannot reconstitute the army, only men – we learn this בְּמִפְרָשׁ from our parsha – the IDF would well heed this, regarding the integration of women in combat), purifying the soldiers from טְמֵאת מַת.

If we closely examine the three times (above) that Moshe got angry and forgot the halacha, we will notice that *all three* are related to food/water. The first is related to eating the korban חֲטָאת, the second is related to giving Am Yisrael water to drink after the Well of Miriam dried up after Miriam died and finally, here in our parsha, regarding vessels for preparing food.

Our parsha is teaching us an enormous musar haskel. Anger and food do not mix! **Keep anger out of the kitchen and away from the table.**

If we examine the three incidences that Moshe got angry, they were also *connected to kohanim*. The first in ויקרא directly involved Elazar (and Itamar). The second in Mei Meriva involved Aharon, and the third here in our parsha again involved Elazar.

When it comes to the Jewish kitchen and the Jewish table, we need someone of the caliber of a kohen to relay the halachot – because kohanim are אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם. If you have anger in the kitchen and at the table, you can cause irreversible damage.

This is not to say that the husband should be absent and uninvolved in the goings on in the kitchen, he definitely should be involved. We learn this from Adam HaRishon/Chava and Avraham/Sarah (עמ' קסז, פרק טו, מאיר פנים).

Adam decided to leave the entire running of his "kitchen" to Chava and was not involved at all. When Chava presented him with the fruit of the הַדְּעִית, Adam just ate it without asking questions – "What is this new food? What *hechsher* does it have? What bracha do you make on it? etc." Instead, he simply

ate it and later got *angry* at Chava for duping him. We are still living the repercussions of that.

Avraham was not involved in cooking in the kitchen, he left the cooking (and baking) up to Sarah, but Avraham was involved with *what went on* in the kitchen. He did revision of the halachot of matzot with Sarah when they were visited by the angels. He was involved in the selection of the calves, supervising the shechita etc. before they became calf tongues in mustard sauce made by Sarah. Avraham was not the cook, but he was involved in the kitchen. Unlike Adam and Chava, the interaction was not one of absence and anger. The mida of Avraham is chessed. Avraham's entire interaction with Sara was בְּדַרְכֵי נֵעָם, without anger. In fact, we never read anywhere about Avraham becoming angry (we do read about Sarah becoming angry with Avraham חַמְסֵי עָלֶיךָ, but that was not food related).

To preserve shalom in the home and especially in the kitchen, the husband should behave with the mida of אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם. Regarding kashrut, regarding how the food tastes (one is allowed to tell white lies to preserve שְׁלוֹם), there has to be a total absence of any anger.

Similarly, at the table. It is important to maintain decorum and halacha at the table, but it has to be achieved בְּדַרְכֵי נֵעָם. The bitter aftertaste of food that is slightly burnt is כְּאֵין וּכְאֶפֶס compared to the bitter aftertaste of anger at the table. The former quickly dissipates, the latter causes trauma, sometimes for generations. When there is stress at the table it can also result in digestive disorders (מאיר פנים, פרק יד, עמי קנט).

כָּל דָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יָבֵא בָאֵשׁ תִּעְבְּרוּ בָאֵשׁ וְטָהַר אִדּוֹ בְּמֵי נֹדָה וְתַחֲטֵא וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָבֵא בָאֵשׁ תִּעְבְּרוּ בְּמַיִם. The kashering, whether it is preceded by fire or boiling - it always ends with the cooling effect of water. Perhaps the reason Aharon was also punished at Mei Meriva, is because he did not have this cooling effect on Moshe's fire of anger.

This is a huge musar haskel from our parsha, keep the fire and boiling disposition away from the kitchen and table and always sooth them with the cooling effect of water. Find the correct balance between סוּר מֵרַע and עֲשֵׂה טוֹב.

Shabbat Shalom

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