**Weekly Parasha Insights by Rabbi Eli Mansour**

**ParashatMatot-Masei:**

**Splitting the Tribe of Menashe**

In ParashatMatot we read of the request made by the tribes Reuben and Gad, who approached Moshe to ask if they could permanently reside in the territory east of the Jordan River. Beneh Yisrael had captured this region from the kingdoms of Sihon and Og, and Reuben and Gad decided that the lush pastures in this region suited them well, as they had large herds of cattle. They therefore asked permission to settle in this region rather than live together with the other tribes in Eretz Yisrael. Moshe was initially angered by Reuben and Gad’s request, but he later acquiesced once they expressed their intent to join the other tribes in the war to capture Eretz Yisrael.

Surprisingly, at the end of the story, a third tribe suddenly enters the picture. The Torah (32:33) tells that Moshe granted the region east of the Jordan River to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and also to half the tribe of Menashe. The question naturally arises as to why half of Menashe received part of this territory, if the request was made only by Reuben and Gad.

The answer, perhaps, emerges from a story told in last week’s Parasha, ParashatPinhas. There we read of the five daughters of Selofhad, a man who had died in the wilderness and left five daughters and no sons. The five daughters approached Moshe and asked for the right to receive their father’s portion in the Land of Israel. G-d then spoke to Moshe and affirmed that this request was legitimate, and that Selofhad’s daughters rightfully deserved the portion that was to have been granted to their father (27:7).

Rashi notes that when the Torah there introduces Selofhad’s daughters (27:1), it tells us that they belonged to the tribe of Menashe, and it emphasizes that Menashe was a son of Yosef. Of course, we are already quite familiar with Menashe, and there thus seems, at first glance, to be no reason for the Torah to have to identify him as Yosef’s son.

Rashi explains that the Torah emphasized the relationship between Selofhad’s daughters and Yosef to allude to us that they both shared a genuine love and affinity for the Land of Israel. Yosef, at the end of his life, made his brothers swear that they would bring his remains to Eretz Yisrael for burial, and Selofhad’s daughters desired a portion of the land. The Torah therefore associates Selofhad’s daughters with Yosef to express the fact that they loved and cherished the Land of Israel just like their ancestor, Yosef.

This may shed light on Menashe’s portion east of the Jordan River. Reuven and Gad’s request was ultimately granted, but it reflected a deficiency in their connection to Eretz Yisrael. Their preference to settle across the river to accommodate their herds indicated that they did not sufficiently appreciate the special sanctity of the Land of Israel. Moshe therefore decided to have the people of Menashe, the tribe of Selofhad’s daughters, reside in the eastern territory together with Reuben and Gad. This was done to help infuse these two tribes with the genuine love for Eretz Yisrael that they were lacking.

The question, however, remains, why did Moshe instruct only half of Menashe to reside east the river? Why did he not simply have all of Menashe live in this region together with Reuben and Gad?

Our Sages explained that the division of the tribe of Menashe was a punishment, of sorts, for an act committed by the founder of this tribe. Many years earlier, when Yosef was the vizier of Egypt, his brothers came from Eretz Yisrael to purchase grain in Egypt. Yosef ordered his servants to place his goblet in the luggage of the youngest brother, Binyamin, and then, after the brothers left Egypt, Yosef sent his son, Menashe, to run after them and accuse them of theft.

Sure enough, Menashe searched through the brothers’ luggage and found Yosef’s goblet in Binyamin’s bag. Realizing that they had been framed, and fearing that they would be severely punished, the brothers tore their garments as a sign of mourning (Bereshit 44:13). Hazal teach that as Menashe caused his uncles to tear their garments, it was decreed that his tribe would be “torn” into two segments, each residing in a separate territory. This is why only half of the tribe of Menashe settled east of the Jordan River together with Reuben and Gad.

This demonstrates the far-reaching repercussions of each and every action we perform. Menashe’s act, causing his uncles great distress, yielded significant consequences for centuries. We never know how our seemingly small decisions, words and actions will affect our lives and the lives of our children, grandchildren and future descendants. The story of Menashe thus reminds us of the need to live with a keen sense of responsibility, to carefully calculate and consider every action, to ensure that the long-term outcome will be positive and beneficial for ourselves and for future generations.