

“Oh, today I saw the same old woman,” begins Sarah as her mother beams at her, “and I bought a bigger ice cream!”

### Calendar

*Mevorchim Chodesh Menachem Av  
Molad: Sun 23 Jul 22:00:14*

- ◆ Shacharis 8:30 am; Shtibl 8:45 am
- ◆ Shul Brocha in the Seeff Hall.
- ◆ **Sushi & Black Label Farbrengen** - with a report back from Rebbetzin Estee’s recent JWRP ladies Israel Tour
- ◆ Mincha: 5:00 pm
- ◆ Pirkei Avos: Chapter 2
- ◆ Shabbos ends: 6:10 pm
- ◆ **Rosh Chodesh:** Monday 24 July
- ◆ Mincha next week 5:25 pm

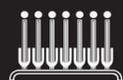
Friday Night 18 August  
**Young Adults Dinner**  
with Herman Mashaba,  
Mayor of Johannesburg

- ◆ The **Scottish Leader Signature** whiskey at Shul is sponsored by **Distell** & available for purchase at **Norman Goodfellows**.
- ◆ **Nathan Fine** of I.deal Furnishers at Midway Mall, Bramley Gardens wishes all congregants a Good Shabbos. Call 011-887-5456/082-854-5706. **Furniture, Bedding & Appliances.**
- ◆ **Vehicles wanted. Any make, any condition. Best prices. Phone ARNOLD ORKIN 082 823 7826**
- ◆ Acknowledgements: Chabad.org
- ◆ Please take Good Shabbos Sydenham home if you will only carry it within the Eiruv.



# Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

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22 Jul 2017 Parshas Matos-Masai 28 Tammuz 5777

## Promises, Promises... by: Rabbi Yossy Goldman

I have always been intrigued by the traditional way in which diamond merchants would seal a deal. They shake hands and say “Mazel and Brocha” (Good fortune and blessing). Once those few words have been said, the deal is done and it has all the power of a legal, contractual transaction. Apparently, things have changed in the industry of late, which is a pity.

At any rate, it was a tribute to the diamond fraternity that in their industry a word is a word. In some other industries, even a contract isn’t worth the paper it’s written on. Here, the spoken word was always deemed to be binding and irrevocable. Interestingly, the Mazel & Brocha principle has been upheld in arbitration cases throughout the world.

This week’s first Parsha, Matos, opens with an injunction about the sanctity of our words. *And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes...if a man takes a vow...he shall not desecrate his word, whatever issues from his mouth he shall do.*

A word is a word. Promises are promises. And the words we utter are sacred and inviolate. If we disregard what we say, we have profaned and desecrated our words. That’s why many people are careful to add the words *bli neder* (“without vowing”) whenever they say something that might be construed as a vow. Should they be prevented from fulfilling their promises and be guilty of sacrilege, the words *bli neder* stipulate that their undertaking does not have the full force of a vow, making the offense less grave. Never-

theless, that disclaimer in no way diminishes the regard we hold for our words.

The question is why was this commandment given to the heads of the tribes? Surely, it applies to each and every one of us. The simple answer is that since it is usually leaders who make the most promises, therefore it is they who need the most cautioning.

Politicians are infamous for campaign promises, which - once they are elected - are rarely fulfilled. Like the candidate who promised to lower taxes if he were elected. As soon as he took office, though, he raised taxes. When he was challenged by the people about his unkept promise, he actually admitted that he had lied. The naïve electorate thought that was quite a genuine confession and promptly decided that he was the most honest politician they had ever met. We are a gullible people indeed.

Many books have been published on the subject of Business Ethics. While there are a great many laws and nuances to this theme, at the end of the day, the acid test of business ethics is “did you keep your word?” Did you carry out your commitments, or did you duck and dive around them? It makes no difference how other companies are behaving. It matters little whether our competitors are corrupt. We must honour our promises and that is the ultimate bottom line.

Whether in our business relationships or in the *Tzedakah* pledges we make to the Synagogue or to other charities, our word should be our bond. Even if we are worried about the immediate financial costs, we can be assured that with the passage

### DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

Sunday 6 August – **Siyum Sefer Torah:**  
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*Celebrating the Past as we Shape the Future*

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Rabbi Yossy and Rochel Goldman,  
a Decade of Innovation in reaching out to the next generation by  
Rabbi Yehuda and Estee Stern,  
the Bar Mitzvah year of Chazan Yudi Cohen

**WEDNESDAY 9 AUGUST**  
COCKTAILS 6:30 PM  
Sydenham Community Centre

R160 per person  
RSVP ESSENTIAL: [www.sydshul.co.za](http://www.sydshul.co.za) or at Sydenham Shul

of time, the reputation we will acquire by speaking truthfully and keeping our word will more than compensate any short-term losses.

So, leave the spin doctoring to the politicians. A Jew's word should be sacred.

## Parsha Pointers

*Matos-Masai: Artscroll pg 900;  
Living Torah pg 823*

Moses conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Israel. War is waged against Midian for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Israel, and the Torah gives a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the High Priest. The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Menasseh) ask for the lands east of the Jordan as their portion in the Promised Land, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, but subsequently agrees on the condition that they first join, and lead, in Israel's conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

The forty-two journeys and encampments of Israel are listed, from the Exodus to their encampment on the plains of Moab across the river from the Land of Canaan. The boundaries of the Promised Land are given, and cities of refuge are designated as havens and places of exile for inadvertent murderers. The daughters of Tzefafchad marry within their own tribe of Menasseh, so that the estate which they inherit from their father should not pass to the province of another tribe.

## I Love You More Than You Love Me

*By Rabbi Yanki Tauber*

It's that time of year when we're reminded of our marriage. The prophets point out that G-d wed us at Sinai, admonish us for our betrayals, and promise that there are good times yet ahead.

You can usually tell when two people are in

love, but the best way to recognize a married couple is by their arguments. These are arguments that you won't see anywhere else, for the simple reason that they don't make any sense anywhere but within the context of marriage.

We find one such argument in this week's Torah reading. (Actually, the argument takes two different forms, explained in different ways by our sages; but underneath, I believe, it's the same argument.)

The disagreement concerns G-d's instructions to Moses to wage war on the Midianites. "Avenge the vengeance of the children of Israel upon the Midianites," G-d says to the Jewish leader. But when Moses conveys these instructions to the people, he tells them that they're going to war "to take G-d's vengeance on Midian." Who is the offended party, G-d or Israel?

The Midrash Tanchuma explains: the Midianites caused the people of Israel to sin and worship the idol Pe'or, causing G-d to punish His people with a plague. So G-d tells Israel: "It is you who have an account to settle with them, for they caused Me to harm you." To which Moses responds: "Master of the Universe! If we had been uncircumcised, or idol-worshippers, or had denied the commandments, the Midianites would not have hated us. They persecute us only on account of the Torah and the precepts which You have given us. Consequently the vengeance is Yours . . ."

Rashi has a different take on the contradiction, and this theme is taken up by the chassidic masters: G-d sees the war on Midian as avenging Israel, for G-d's foremost concern is for His people; the people of Israel see the war as avenging G-d, for they are concerned only with the honor of G-d.

Typical marital argument logic. Husband: "How could you do that to me? When you act that way, it makes me angry at you, and then I hurt you. I'll never forgive you for making me hurt the woman I love!" Wife: "If you wouldn't have mar-

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ried me, we wouldn't be so special to each other, and it wouldn't hurt you so much when I act that way. So it's all *your* fault."

Or the flip side of that argument, equally (il)logical: "I love you more than you love me!" "No! I love *you* more than *you* love me!"

We've been arguing that way for more than 3,300 years now.

## Petty Theft

*By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum*

You would never steal a towel or bathrobe from a friend's house, so why are you so tempted every time you check out of a hotel?

You'd never borrow money and then falsely claim to have returned it, so why do so many people economize with the truth when filling out their tax returns?

When shopping at the local corner store, you scrupulously pay for everything in your basket and return the extra change you were given by mistake, but when negotiating on the phone with the call center of a multinational corporation, you sometimes stretch the truth and present a totally skewed perspective on the issues.

It's not honesty that keeps you from theft; it's empathy. When dealing with an individual you can see the direct impact of your actions, while lying to the government or ripping off a conglomerate feels like a victimless crime. The supermarket chain will never miss that grape you just popped in your mouth, and how can you trust the government to spend your tax dollars wisely? They'll never miss what they don't know.

But you know the truth. To steal one cent is as immoral as stealing a million dollars. It is as wrong to take something from the government as it is to take it from a neighbor. Morality is not relative; it just feels that way sometimes.

And this might explain a seeming redundancy in this week's Parshah. The Jews were commanded to go to war against the nation of Midian. One thousand men of each tribe were drafted, and enjoyed a miraculous victory in battle. They captured tremendous treasures of booty from their victorious campaign. The Torah then goes into extreme detail to describe how these spoils were distributed amongst the warriors, the *kohanim*, the Levites and

the rest of Israel. Not only does it enumerate the value of the gold and the exact number of sheep, cows, donkeys and slaves captured, it even calculates as a percentage and then again as an final amount how many of each item were kept by the warriors and then how much was given away (Numbers 31:26-54).

It hardly seems necessary to go into such detail. Why not just tell us that the soldiers came back with a whole heap of loot, and kicked back a percentage to those they left behind? Those Midianite sheep and cows have been dead for over 3,000 years by now; why should I care exactly how many there were in the first place?

But that's the point the Torah is making. Every single animal was counted; every gold coin and necklace was accounted for. Not one Israelite indulged in a spot of private pilage or plunder, and nobody went looking to feather his own nest.

It would have been so tempting to skim some off the top. Doesn't G-d help those who help themselves? It would hardly seem like theft; it's random Midianite treasure, belonging to no one in particular, and all the original owners are dead already anyway.

And that's why the Torah enumerates everything that came in and everything that went out: to reaffirm for all ages that when we live life according to G-d's rules, every cent counts. There is no such thing as a small theft, because ultimately everything belongs to G-d.

## Live & Laugh

Leah gives 50p to her daughter Sarah. The little girl goes outside and returns 10 minutes later without the coin. Wondering what she had done with the money, Leah asks, "Where is the 50p I gave you, darling?"

"I gave it to an old lady," says Sarah. "Oh you sweet girl. I am so proud. Tomorrow you will have £1."

The next day, true to her word, Leah give Sarah a whole pound. Off Sarah goes outside and returns later without the coin. "What did you do with the £1?"

