



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

28 – 29 July, 2005

22 TAMMUZ, 5765

Parashat Mattot
(Numbers 30:2–32:42)

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Torah study is always challenging! At times, we Jews hold the verses in clear focus and allow our thoughts to embrace meanings that flow from our own life experience. We may feel uplifted by what we have read—that our ancient people had such sensitivity to individual or communal problems. Then there are times, when we are so uncomfortable with our reading that our first response is to disavow.

When we study in a group, we have the opportunity to exchange ideas, interpretations, and questions. Should this fail to satisfy us, we should remember that “Torah study” implies *study*. We can turn to a commentary for fuller understanding or different perspective. By seeking this new or deeper insight into Torah, we also become partners with the lay and rabbinic voices of yesterday in trying to draw contemporary meaning from this ancient text.. And it is okay to feel some pride in the knowledge that the Torah “giants” of yesterday agree with us, or perhaps more humbly, that we agree with them.

The crucial point is to know that being Jewish gives us a license to challenge and to question the text.

In our Parasha for this week, we can certainly protest the slaughter that Moses demands. After all, Jethro, the Midianite leader, was not only the father-in-law of Moses, he was also his wise counselor who guided Moses in the organization of the tribes after the Israelites had gone forth from Egypt. So we ask, what happened between those earlier Midianites, and these? What other meaning can there be when a battle involving thousands takes place, thousands of Midianites die, yet there is not a single death among the Israelite soldiers. Why are only virgin women permitted to survive? How come there are no arguments with God?

We turn next to the fascinating account of the precautions taken when either a man or a woman makes a vow. Vow making is serious business. It involves calling upon God as a witness, and thus, as a participant. So if you make a vow, be prepared to nurture it. However, women are treated differently than men. The vow of a woman must have the approval of their father if they are single, or their husbands if they are married. Only women who are divorced or widows may have the standing similar to a man.

And lastly, is it just good cattle country that motivates the two-and-a-half tribes to make a special request of Moses? Come, join us for study, and see how Moses handles his anger. What you suggestions would you have offered?

Shabbat Shalom
21 Tammuz 5765

28th July, 2005