

PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI
NUMBERS 30:2-36:13
29 TAMUZ 5782/28 JULY 2022



The Misunderstanding (La Mesentente)
Acrylic on paper by Jean Dubuffet

ART AT THE EDGE

1. Moses spoke to the heads of the Israelite tribes (*matot*)... (Numbers 30:2)
Associated with you shall be a man from each tribe (*mateh*)... (Numbers 1:4)

These were the marches (*mase-ei*) of the Israelites... (Numbers 33:1)
...and so they marched (*na'sa'oo*), each with his clan... (Numbers 2:34)
2. “Do not cause us to cross over the Jordan.” (Numbers 32:5)
3. “Are your brothers to go to war while you stay here?” Why will you turn the minds of the Israelites from crossing over into the land that God has given them? That is what your ancestors did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to survey the land.” (Numbers 32:6-8)
4. The explanation is that they said to Moses: “You don’t have to give us an inheritance along with those who settle on the western side, thereby making their inheritance smaller, for an inheritance which is suitable for us has come to us, since it is a land fit for cattle and we have more cattle than other tribes.” This they said in the nature of a request, not by way of contention. (Nahmanides)

5. They confused Moses. By their speech they led him to assume that they feared the battle ahead and were seeking a way to avoid helping conquer the land. They should have said: “We are ready to join in conquering the land and will be satisfied if you allow us to inherit this land east of the Jordan.” (Abravanel)
6. Moses should have apologized for his hasty, false assumptions. Their error was not in their motives but in their lack of clarity about their goals. They were incapable of articulating a clear direction. (Akedat Yitzhak)
7. Theorems are easier to prove when you assume they’re true in the first place. (Evelyn Lamb, “What T.S. Eliot Told Me about the Chain Rule,” *Scientific American*, 03/21/14)
8. We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
(T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *Four Quartets*)