



Matot-Masei

G-D DOESN'T WANT IT DARKER

If It Seems That Way, Great Things Must Be Coming

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Matot-Masei

Moses conveys to the heads of the tribes of Israel the laws governing the annulment of vows.

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 among the people, the warriors, the Levites, and the High Priest.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Manasseh) 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.

Also in *Masei*: 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 Zelophehad marry within their own tribe

of Manasseh, so that the estate that they inherit from their father should not pass to another tribe.

QUESTIONS

How does one pull out of despair when life falls to pieces?

Is maintaining belief at the point of the sword naïve, or a noble wisdom passed down through the ages?

TEXT 1

Mishnah, Taanit 4:6

בְּתִשְׁעָה בְּאָב:

1. נִגְזַר עַל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁלֹּא יִכְנסוּ לָאָרֶץ,

2. וְתָרַב הַבַּיִת בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה,

3. וּבִשְׁנֵיָהּ,

4. וְנִלְכְּדָה בֵּיתָר,

5. וְנִחְרְשָׁה הָעִיר.

מִשְׁנֻכָּנס אָב, מִמַּעֲטִין בְּשִׂמְחָה.

On the Ninth of Av:

1. It was decreed that our ancestors would not enter Israel.

2. The first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed.

3. The second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed.

4. Beitar was captured.

5. Jerusalem was plowed over.

Thus, when the month of Av enters, we decrease in joy.



Five Major Tragedies on the 9th of Av:

- The spies account; G-d decreed the death of the generation.
- The destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash.
- The destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash.
- Jerusalem plowed over.
- Beitar destroyed; The end of the Jews' revolt.

TEXT 2

ELIE WIESEL,
“PILGRIMAGE TO THE
COUNTRY OF NIGHT,”
THE NEW YORK TIMES,
NOVEMBER 4, 1979

Thirty-five years later, a survivor of the Holocaust revisits Auschwitz and other Nazi death camps. What memorial, he wonders, can do justice to six million Jewish martyrs? We can only listen to their tragic silence. . . .

On the eve of Tisha B’Av, the day commemorating the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, we went to Warsaw’s only remaining synagogue, on Nozyk Street. We were welcomed by a dozen congregants, including two American rabbis.

The service was held in a small, dilapidated side

room, since the main synagogue was being repaired.

Following custom, we turned the benches upside down and, by flickering candlelight, began to recite the Eicha, the Lamentations of Jeremiah: “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people?”

As I read aloud the prophet’s evocation of a desolate Jerusalem, I stole a look at the “Jewish community” of Warsaw: a few retired old people, haggard and worn out. And I was struck by the incongruity of the situation: the text was referring to

Jerusalem, but it applied to Warsaw, to Jewish Warsaw. . . .

What is left of Warsaw, its Talmudic schools, its cultural clubs, its Hasidic centers, its political groups, its sages and its princes? A small Jewish theater nearby, a few offices, a Yiddish weekly. And a few meager candles down which wax drips like tears of agony.

The Jews of Warsaw are no longer in Warsaw; they are in Treblinka, two hours away.

TEXT 2

ELIE WIESEL,
“PILGRIMAGE TO THE
COUNTRY OF NIGHT,”
THE NEW YORK TIMES,
NOVEMBER 4, 1979

The Jews of Warsaw are
beneath the stones of
Treblinka; they are the
stones of Treblinka.

There they stand at
attention, silently accusing. .
. .

And there is nothing left to
say. Another Kaddish? And
another one? How many
prayers can one say for an
entire world? How many
candles must one light for
mankind? So as not to betray
ourselves by betraying the
dead, we can only open
ourselves to their silenced
memories.

And listen.

TEXT 3

Numbers 33:1

אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים
לצבאתם, ביד משה ואהרן.

These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who left Egypt in their legions under the charge of Moses and Aaron.

QUESTION

If the Torah was going to list not only the journeys but also the encampments, why were the encampments not mentioned in the introductory passage?

Moreover, the name of the Torah portion is Masei—journeys. Not “encampments” or “journeys and encampments.” Why are the encampments blotted out?

TEXT 4A

*Rabbi Moshe Chaim
Efraim of Sudilkov, Degel
Machaneh Efraim, Masei*

אך דע ששמעתי בשם אדוני אבי זקני, זכרונו
לברכה לחיי העולם הבא, כי כל המסעות היו מ"ב,
והם אצל כל אדם מיום היולדו עד שובו אל עולמו.
ולהבין זה, כי מיום הלידה והוצאתו מרחם אמו הוא
בחינת יציאת מצרים כנודע. ואחר כך נוסע ממסע
למסע, עד בואו לארץ החיים העליונה. . . .

ובוודאי נכתבו המסעות בתורה להורות הדרך
הישר לאיש הישראלי, לידע הדרך אשר ילך בו כל
ימי חייו ליסע ממסע למסע.

וידוע שכל המסעות הם בחינת קדושים וטהורים.

Know that I heard from my saintly master
and grandfather [Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem
Tov] of blessed memory that these forty-
two journeys are the life journey of every
person from the day of birth until we
return our souls to our Maker. The day we
emerge from our mother's womb is an
exodus of sorts. We then travel from one
journey to the next until we arrive to the
eternal world of life in the celestial
spheres. . . .

These journeys were certainly delineated
in the Torah to teach us the proper path,
so that we would know the path that we
must tread all our lives, from one journey
to the next.

And know that each journey is holy and
pure.

TEXT 4B

Rabbi Shimon Sofer, Torat Moshe, Numbers 33:17; 33:25-26

”ויסעו מקברות התאווה ויחנו בחצרות”: רמז שנסעו מקברות התאווה, שקברו חמדת התאווה והמותרות, למדריגה יותר.

”ויחנו בחצירות”, שדימו העולם הזה רק לחצר, להכין עצמו בתורה ובמצות ובמעשים טובים, ליכנס לחיי עולם הבא. וכדתנן: ”העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור, התקן עצמך בפרוזדור כדי שתכנס לטרקלין” (אבות ד, טז).

”ויסעו מחרדה ויחנו במקלות”, ויסעו ממקהלות ויחנו בתחת”: רמז . . . שאם יש לישראל אחדות ושלוש, אפילו עובדי עבודה זרה אין רע שולט בהם . . . וזה שנסעו מחרדה, שלא היו צריכים להחריד על ידי שחנו במקלה באחדות.

אבל אחר כך שנסעו מקלה, חנו בתחת - בדיוטא תחתונה, עד ששבו וחנו אחר כך במתקה וביטבתה.

They departed Kivrot Hataavah—“the burial place of the lusts”: this means that they buried their appeal for luxuries and lust and moved to a holier state of mind.

They settled in Chazerot—“courtyards”: They perceived the world as merely a courtyard in which Torah must be studied and good deeds must be performed in preparation for the World to Come. As our sages taught, “This world is like an anteroom. Prepare yourself in the anteroom so that you may enter the banquet hall” (Mishnah, Avot 4:16).

They departed Charedah—“fear and trembling”—and settled in Makhelot—“unity”: If we are unified and at peace with each other, no harm can befall us. . . . They departed fear and trembling because they were settled in unity. They departed Makhelot—“unity”—and settled in Tachah—“a lowly sphere.” When they parted from unity, they had to settle in a lowly sphere. They remained there until they changed their ways and eventually settled in Mitkah—“sweetness”—and “Yatvatah”—goodness.

If G-d gave us
another day, it is
intended for us to
journey to yet a
higher and better
sphere.





Journeys vs.
travels

TEXT 5

*Rabbi Shlomo Efraim ben
Aharon of Luntshitz, Keli
Yakar, Numbers 10:29*

ונראה שלשון הליכה נופל על תנועת הרגלים לבד,
המעתיקין את האדם ממקום למקום, אבל יכול
להיות שאף בהיותו הולך למקום אחר מכל מקום
עדיין דעתו קשורה במקום אשר הלך משם, אבל
לשון נסיעה - העתקה כוללת לגופו ולמחשבתו מכל
וכל.

The word “travel” is limited to the narrow act of moving one’s legs, namely uprooting from one location to another. It’s entirely possible that despite moving to a new location, one maintains a psychological attachment to the previous location. By contrast, the word “journey” connotes a clean psychological break from the previous place.

We never settle for
yesterday's
achievements. Our
focus is always on
moving onward to even
higher and better goals.



TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
6, p. 237*

און דאס איז דער ביאור אין דעם וואס די מקומות
החניה פון אידן האבן (ניט בלויז זייער אייגענע
מעלה, נאר) אויך די מעלה פון די "מסעות", ווייל
דורך דעם וואס "ממקום החניה חזרו ונסעו", זיינען
זיי גופא נתעלה געווארן אין דעם ענין ה"מסעות".

און הגם אז די עליה (בפועל) קומט ערשט בשעת
המסע וואס נאך דער חניה, ויבאלד אבער אז די
כוונת החניה מלכתחילה איז (אויך) צוליב דעם
מסע שלאחריה, איז בפנימיות ובהעלם איז זי שוין
אויך פריער א מסע.

Our ancestors viewed reaching their encampment not only as an achievement but also as a prelude to the next journey. The very fact that they would journey forth from this place made the encampment a launching point, and therefore an integral part, of the next journey.

Even though the next journey would only begin after they had rested, the primary intention of this camp was the journey that would follow. The inner dimension of the camp was not (just) a place to rest. It was (also) a place from which to journey.



As finite humans, we must rest and rejuvenate. However, our resting places are pit stops, not destinations.

QUESTIONS

If the Torah was going to list not only the journeys but also the encampments, why were the encampments not mentioned in the introductory passage?

Moreover, the name of the Torah portion is *Masei*—journeys. Not “encampments” or “journeys and encampments.” Why are the encampments blotted out?

ANSWER

The encampments are bookends of the journey. Thus, they too are called journeys. There really is no such thing as a place to settle down in our journey of life.

QUESTION

What happens when life forces us to stall or fall back? Are these too somehow part of the journey forward?

Painful
experiences
are also
part of the
journey.



TEXT 7

*Benjamin Hull, Benjamin
Hull Urges Viewers Never
To Give Up,
www.foxnews.com,
January 26, 2023*

I think it is really important when you are feeling low, and there were many times that I was really at the bottom, you have to know that there is good on the other side. That if you work hard and if you dedicate yourself to getting somewhere and you don't stop trying to achieve that, you will get there. No matter how painful something is, no matter how hard it is, if you really want to and you have the support to do it, you can get there. Never give up. Never assume it's all over. . . .

I remember from the very day this happened, remembering and thinking that I will get back. I remember lying there, when it happened in the middle of nowhere, very badly injured, and thinking, I am going home no matter what. I will crawl if I have to. And I thought that way throughout. And that thought is what got me here. . . .

So, for anyone else who is going through really difficult things, keep going. Never give up. It's inside of you and there is always good on the other side.

TEXT 8

Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), p. 135

We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation—just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer—we are challenged to change ourselves.

Let me cite a clear-cut example: Once, an elderly general practitioner consulted me because of his severe depression. He could not overcome the loss of his wife who had died two years before and whom he had loved above all else. Now, how could I help him? What should I tell him? Well, I refrained from telling him anything but instead confronted him with the question, “What would have happened, Doctor, if you had died first, and your wife would have had to survive you?” “Oh,” he said, “for her this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!” Whereupon I replied, “You see, Doctor, such a suffering has been spared her, and it was you who have spared her this suffering—to be sure, at the price that now you have to survive and mourn her.” He said no word but shook my hand and calmly left my office.

In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.



Every stop, no matter how long or painful, moves your journey forward in ways you could never imagine.

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
23, p. 227*

והסברה בזה: די כוונה ותכלית פון דער ירידה אין
גלות איז די גאולה שלאחריה (ירידה צורך עליה).

ודוקא דורך דער ירידה ווערט אויפגעטאן אן עליה
— נאך העכער ווי פאר דער ירידה, כיתרון האור
מן החשך.

To explain: The only purpose of descending into the dark experience of Exile is the phenomenal Redemption that will follow. It is a fall for the purpose of a subsequent climb.

It is only by falling into the darkness that you can climb to dizzying heights, even higher than the level from which you fell. It is like the intensity of light that can be experienced only after emerging from darkness.

TEXT 10

*Rabbi Chaim ibn Atar, Or
Hachayim, Numbers 33:1*

שהליכת ישראל במדבר היתה לברר ניצוצי
הקדושה . . . במדבר השמם ששם קנה מקומו
מקום נחש שרף ועקרב. ודרכו שם עדת ה' להוציא
בולעו מפיו.

והוא הטעם שהיו ישראל חונים במקום אחד שנה
ובמקום אחר י"ב שעות, שהוא כפי מה שצריך
לבירור הניצוצות שישנם במקום ההוא.

ובירור זה אין כח בעולם שיכול עשותו זולת
קדושה השלימה . . . היא השכינה וישראל והתורה

...

וביררו בירור עצום.

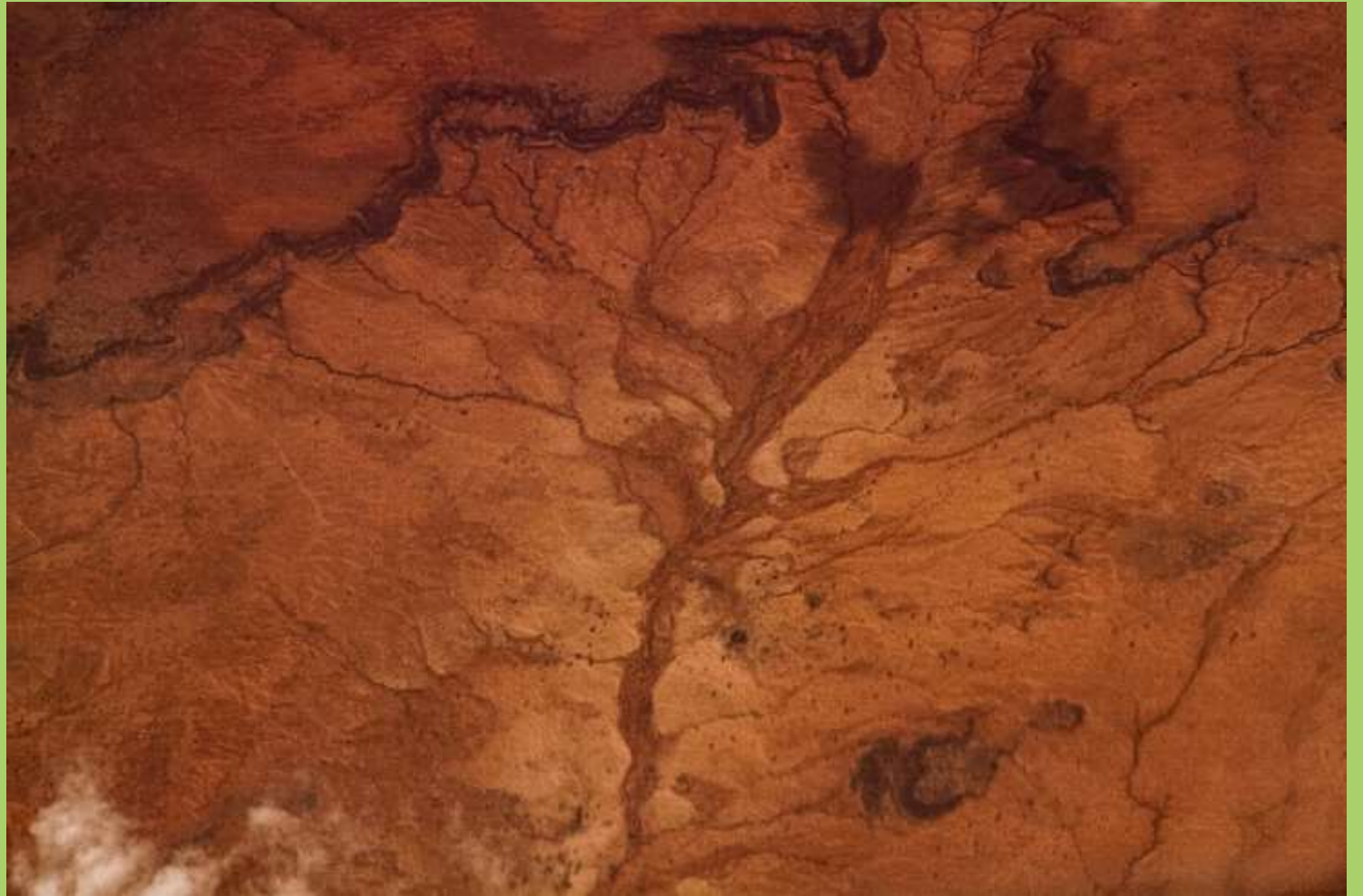
The Jews traveled through the desert to collect the sacred sparks that resided . . . in this wasteland otherwise inhabited by snakes, vipers, and scorpions. G-d's people marched through that desolate wilderness to liberate the holy sparks from imprisonment.

This is why our ancestors settled in one place for a year and another place for twelve hours. Each was according to the number of sparks they had to collect.

No other group could have accomplished this. Only the perfect combination of sanctity comprised . . . of G-d, the Jews, and the Torah. . . .

Indeed, they collected a magnificent assortment [of sparks].

It was only because the Jews spent forty years in the desert introducing G-dliness and holiness wherever they went that these sparks were liberated.



TEXT 11

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Igrot Kodesh
12, p. 414*

מיום הלכי ל"חדר" ועוד קודם לזה התחיל
להתרקם בדמיוני ציור גאולה העתידה - גאולת עם
ישראל מגלותו האחרון.

גאולה כזו ובאופן כזה שעל ידה יהיו מובנים ייסורי
הגלות הגזירות והשמדות . . . והכל יהיה באופן
אשר בלבב שלם ובהבנה מלאה - "יאמר ביום
ההוא אודך ה' כי אנפת בי" (ישעיה יב, א).

From the time I was a child attending
cheder, and even earlier, a vision of the
future Redemption of the Jewish people
from their final Exile began to take shape
in my imagination:

A Redemption of such magnitude and
grandeur, that through it, the purpose of
the sufferings, harsh decrees, and anguish
of Exile would be understood. . . . It will all
take place in a manner that we will be
able to say with a full heart and with
complete understanding, "Thank you G-d
for the suffering you put me through"
(Isaiah 12:1).

QUESTION

How does one pull out of despair when life falls to pieces?

ANSWER

When Mashiach comes, we will see these breakdowns as pit stops on the incredible journey of life. Knowing this is so helps us escape despair and hold on to an increasingly optimistic view of life.

TEXT 12

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
23, p. 228*

אריינגייענדיק אין די טעג פון בין המצרים . . .
וואס דערמאנען א אידן דעם גודל הירידה פון דעם
גלות זה האחרון - זאל ער ניט באווירקט ווערן
ליאוש חס ושלום פון דער ביטערקייט פון מצב
הגלות, נאר ער זאל וויסן זיין אז דאס אלס איז כדי
ער זאל עס איבערמאכן און איבערקערן . . . צו אן
ענין פון "מסעי" און עליות.

און דערפאר דארף ער אין די טעג במיוחד מוסיף
זיין אין חיות והתלהבות ואור, מיט מער
לעבעדיקייט און מער ליכטיקייט (ואין אור אלא
תורה), וואס דאס באלייכט די בין המצרים און
ברענגט בגילוי די מסעות (שבהם) ועליות, ביז דעם
מסע העיקרי שיהפכו ימים אלה "לששון ולשמחה
ולמועדים טובים", במהרה בימינו ממש.

As we enter the time of year . . . that reminds us of the profound challenges of Exile, we cannot allow ourselves to despair, G-d forbid. Rather, we must know that this is all for the sole purpose of remaking and transforming the bitter Exile into a series of journeys and ascents.

We must, therefore, increase our excitement, brightness (i.e., Torah), and enthusiasm during this time. This will illuminate this time of year and highlight the journeys and ascents that are only possible during this time. It will also usher in our most important journey—one that will transform these days into days of festivity, joy, and happiness, speedily in our days.

KEY POINTS

1. Life is a continuous journey from birth to passing. Every day we grow in certain areas, making ourselves and the world a better, holier place.
2. Vacations and relaxation are not goals. They are for gathering strength for our continued journey
3. When we find meaning in suffering, it ceases to be suffering. It gives us the strength to survive.
4. Survival is not enough. Suffering is meant to make us thrive in ways we could not have otherwise achieved. We must seek and seize these opportunities and transform our suffering into goodness.
5. Even when we cannot find that goodness, knowing that it is there helps. Knowing that we will see it when Mashiach comes helps even more. This is how we continue to believe in Mashiach in the harshest of circumstances.

