

Matos-Masei

THE WEISS EDITION

Light points

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

Lightpoints
לזיכרון ולעילוי נשמת
הרה"ח הרה"ת
הר"ר ישעי' זושא
ב"ר אברהם דוד ע"ה ווילהעלם
גלב"ע ביום ד' שבט ה'תשפ"ב
תנצב"ה



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מטות

Matos

 ל:ב | 30:2

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael.

Tough Staff

Here the Torah refers to the tribes of Bnei Yisrael as matos; each individual tribe is called a mateh. Elsewhere, the tribes are called shevatim, with each tribe known as a shevet. Mateh and shevet both mean “wooden branch” or “stick,” and their use in reference to the Jewish people denotes that the tribes are all branches of a single tree.

What is the difference between a shevet and a mateh?

A shevet is a moist, freshly cut branch, or one still attached to the tree, at its most pliable. On the other hand, the term mateh is used in reference to a branch that has lost its moisture and become hard and tough.

In spiritual terms, the tree here represents the common Divine source from which every Jew’s G-dly soul extends. Accordingly, mateh and shevet allude to two different phases

experienced by the G-dly soul in its relationship with its Divine source.

The term shevet refers to the soul when its connection to its source is fresh and evident. In a general sense, this refers to the G-dly soul before its descent into this lowly world to be clothed in a physical body. The dry match, on the other hand, alludes to the G-dly soul while it is within the human body, when its connection to the Divine source is not as obvious.

These two branches likewise represent different eras in Jewish history. The “fresh branch” would best describe the Jewish people in the era of the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple that stood in Jerusalem, when they were constantly aware of G-dliness. In contrast, the dry match alludes to the state of the Jewish people ever since the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the ensuing exile which has sapped us of our spiritual sensitivity.

Yet the term match, or matos, as this Parshah is called, also expresses the benefit engendered by this spiritual dryness: the harsh and bitter exile has uncovered the Jewish people’s intense resolve to observe the Torah even in the most trying of circumstances. Indeed, the challenges and adversity we face in exile have revealed the soul’s unyielding determination to obey G-d’s will, like a firm staff that does not break or bend under pressure.

—Likkutei Sichos, vol. 28, pp. 281–283

 ל:ג | 30:3

אִישׁ כִּי יִדָּר נָדָר לַה'

A man who makes a vow to G-d.

To Abstain or Not to Abstain

"Vows are the safeguard of restraint," says the Mishnah.¹ By prohibiting yourself (through vows) from indulging in even that which the Torah permits, you can effectively fulfill the Torah's command to "sanctify yourself [even] with that which is permitted to you."²

Conversely, the Rambam writes:³

Our Sages directed man to abstain only from those things that the Torah denies him, and not to forbid himself from partaking in permitted things by taking vows and oaths. Rhetorically they asked, "Is that which the Torah prohibited not sufficient for you? [Why] must you add further prohibitions?"

Which is the correct path? Should we vow to abstain from physical indulgence, or are we not to prohibit ourselves from partaking in the permissible pleasures of the world?

The correct approach depends on the spiritual state of the individual. A verse in Koheles describes the two possible states of man with the words "G-d made man upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes."⁴ To the "upright man" who does not pursue any selfish desire, the Sages said,

1. Avos 3:13.

2. See Ramban, Vayikra 19:2; Talmud, Yevamos 20a.

3. Mishneh Torah, Hil. De'os 3:1.

4. Koheles 7:29.

"Is that which the Torah prohibited not sufficient for you? Must you add further prohibitions?" On the contrary, you must endeavor to utilize as many aspects of the material world as possible in the service of G-d, thereby elevating them to a higher purpose.

"Gone in search of many schemes," by contrast, refers to the person who does not view subservience to G-d's will as the only objective in life, but who seeks out opportunity and justification to indulge in the material world. For this person, the delights of the material world are not opportunities for elevation; enjoying them will only make him more self-indulgent. The Torah therefore encourages him to eliminate the risk of further decline by taking vows—"the safeguard to restraint."

—Likkutei Sichos, vol. 4, p. 1076

מסעי

Masei

לג:א | 33:1

אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים

These are the journeys of the children of Israel who left the land of Egypt.

What Goes Down

In Parshas Masei, the Torah recounts the details of Bnei Yisrael's travels as they journeyed through the desert from Egypt to the Promised Land. Citing the Midrash, Rashi compares the Torah's account to "a king whose son was ill, so he took him to a faraway place to heal him. As they returned home, the father recounted all the stages of their journey, saying to him, 'This is where we slept; here we were cold; here your head ached; etc.'" In the same vein, Moshe now reminds Bnei Yisrael of their journeys and struggles over the past 40 years in the desert.

Chassidus likens Bnei Yisrael's desert travels to the journeys of the Jewish people in exile in the "desert of the nations,"¹ with the mission to elevate the spiritually barren world and prepare it for the coming of Moshiach.

These journeys force our G-dly souls to descend from their lofty source On High to face conditions and circumstances which, like a desert, appear to be "uninhabited" by G-dliness. But just as the king and his son's travels were for the purpose of renewed health and healing, the hindrances faced by the soul are ultimately for its own benefit. For not only does the world benefit when a Jew turns it into a home for G-d, but the soul too reaches its greatest spiritual potential as a result of this difficult work. Nevertheless, until that benefit is realized, these hindrances are sources of pain and grievance for the soul—in Rashi's words, "here we were cold; here your head ached..."

Upon their return, however, the Midrash implies that the king and his son revisit the landmarks they passed on their original journey. In the journey of the G-dly soul through the "desert of nations," the return trip refers to the time of Moshiach, at which time we will revisit and ascend each step of our journey through exile. When Moshiach comes, not only will we enjoy the ultimate benefit for which the exile was necessary, we will realize how the very descents and sufferings that the soul experienced in exile were truly part of its climb to the highest heights.

—Likkutei Sichos, vol. 18, pp. 392–395

1. Yechezkel 20:35.

לג:א | 33:1

אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים

These are the journeys of the children of Israel who left the land of Egypt.

Journeys with the King

In Parshas Masei, the Torah gives a summarized account of all the journeys of Bnei Yisrael as they traveled through the desert from Egypt to the Promised Land. The Midrash explains the idea behind this narrative:

This is analogous to a king whose son was ill, so he took him to a faraway place to heal him. As they returned home, the father recounted all the stages of their journey, saying to him, 'This is where we slept; here we were cold; here your head ached.' Similarly, G-d said to Moshe: Recount for them all the places where they angered Me.

What is the meaning of this parable? What is the purpose of stopping throughout the journey home to revisit and identify all the places where "you angered Me" during the original trip?



With this parable, the Midrash is explaining that Bnei Yisrael's journeys and experiences in the desert are regarded in a different light on the return home—i.e., after the purpose of their travels was achieved. For Bnei Yisrael did not make these journeys on their own. Rather, as in the parable, "the King" accompanied and took them on all these journeys, specifically with their benefit in mind—"to heal him [the son]." It is therefore certain that what may have originally been a

struggle, or even a source of grievance, was at its core a step towards their ultimate goal.

Even when “they angered Me,” meaning that the particular journey represents Bnei Yisrael in a state of failure due to their transgression of G-d’s will, this too was by Divine design.² It was, in essence, a step toward G-d’s ultimate desire that their repentance, fueled by the painful pangs of distance, lead them to a new, greater and more profound relationship with Him.

—Likkutei Sichos, vol. 18, pp. 393–396

2. Although one’s decision to transgress G-d’s will is not influenced by G-d’s knowledge and plans (the reason he is held accountable for his sins, which he commits of his own volition), nevertheless, his profound longing to return, resulting from his failed state, is indeed part of G-d’s plan.



לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ת ישראל שמעון
ב"ר דוד זוסמן ע"ה
שטרן
גלב"ע ביום כ"ו תמוז ה'תשע"א
תנצב"ה

נדפס ע"י בני משפחתו שיחיו



לזכות
הת' לוי יצחק שי'
לרגל הכנסו לעול המצוות בשעטו"מ
ביום כ"ו סיון ה'תשפ"ה
יה"ר שיגדל להיות חסיד, ירא שמים ולמדן
לנח"ר הוריו וכל משפחתו שיחיו

נדפס ע"י הוריו
הרה"ת אהרן עזריאל וזוגתו מרת מושקא שיחיו טעלישבסקי

לעילוי נשמת
מרת שרה נחמה
בת ר' מרדכי אברהם ישעיה ע"ה
בוימגארטען
גלב"ע ביום ר"ח מנחם אב ה'תשע"ו
תנצב"ה
נדפס ע"י בני משפחתה שיחיו

לעילוי נשמת
הרה"ת רפאל ב"ר ישראל משה ע"ה בהריאר
גלב"ע ביום ה' מנחם אב ה'תשנ"ב
תנצב"ה
נדפס ע"י בנו
יצחק ברוך וזוגתו מרת אסתר שיחיו
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