

Parshas Matos-Massei
in a Nutshell
(Numbers 30:2–36:13)

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 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. 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 Tzelafchad marry within their own tribe of Manasseh, so that the estate which they inherit from their father should not pass to the province of another tribe. ❖

Eruv website:
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“For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not hidden from you, neither is it far off.”

By the grace of Hashem, following all CDC Guidelines, our Shul is now able to offer Minyanim at this time. See new schedule to the left, or contact one of the rabbis for details.

תהלים

Tehillim - Psalms

Join us this Shabbos morning
July 18 at 8:30 am for
Shabbos Mevorchim Tehillim.

This week's Tehillim reading is
dedicated to
a refuah sh'laima
for
Avraham Yankel ben Fayge.

Join us each
weekday morning
Mon-Fri as we delve
into the mysteries of
Chassidic concepts.
5:50 am
followed immediately
by Shacharis.



Halachic Zmanim
Shabbos, July 18
Eastern Daylight Time

Earliest Tallis 4:32 AM
Latest Morning Shema 9:19 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola).. 1:40 PM
Plag Hamincha 6:57 PM
Earliest Evening Shema 8:57 PM

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

Rabbi Levi and Leah Neubort

Adult education:

Rabbi Avrohom and Rivky Bergstein

Youth Outreach:

Rabbi Eli and Ruty Steinhauser

Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – July 17 / Tammuz 25

Candle Lighting 8:07 pm
Mincha 7:30 pm

Shabbos Day – July 18 / Tammuz 26

Tehillim Reading 8:30 am
Shacharis 10:00 am*
Torah Reading 10:55 am
Rabbi Neubort's Drasha 11:30 am
Kiddush Postponed
Mincha 8:10 pm
Rabbi's Drasha 8:35 pm
Shabbos Ends 9:13 pm

*Latest morning Shema is now **9:19 AM**. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri) 6:15 am
Shacharis (Sunday) 9:00 am
Mincha / Maariv 8:05 pm

Classes

Chassidus, Mon-Fri Postponed
Halachah, Mon-Fri Postponed
Monday Torah Studies.... Online only
Tuesday Talmud..... Online only
Wednesday Mishna Online only

Chassidic Masters

Hardened Souls, Collected Sparks

*Based on the teachings of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Courtesy of MeaningfulLife.com*

This week's Torah reading is a "double reading", consisting of two parshiot (Torah sections): Matot ("Tribes" or "Rods"-- Numbers 30:2-32:42) and Massei ("Journeys" — Numbers 33:1-36:13)

(Because of the varying configurations of the Jewish calendar year, there can be anywhere from 46 to 54 Shabbat readings in the annual Torah reading cycle. This is why the Torah is divided into 54 parshiot, 16 of which are grouped into eight "pairs" which, in years with less Shabbat readings combine to form a single Parshah.)

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov taught that nothing is incidental in G-d's world. Certainly, adds the Lubavitcher Rebbe, nothing is incidental in G-d's blueprint for creation, the Torah. Each week we "live with the times" (as Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi put it), deriving guidance and inspiration from the week's Parshah. When a "double" reading comes along, we also dwell upon the contrasts and connections between the two Parshiot that combined to form the week's Torah portion.

Add to this the teaching by the great 16th century scholar and Kabbalist Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz (the "Shaloh"), that the weekly Torah

reading bears an integral relationship with the other time-landmarks with which it intersects. The fact that a certain Parshah is read in a certain month, or in proximity to a certain festival, imparts an additional facet to the lessons with which it instructs our lives that week.

So what is the lesson of Matot, what is essence of Massei, and what is the connection between them? And what is the significance of the fact that these two Parshiot are always read — some years separately, and other years together — during "The Three Weeks", the 21-day period from Tammuz 17 to Av 9 when we mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple and the onset of the centuries-long galut (exile and spiritual displacement)? The following is based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's talks on several Shabbat gatherings (farbrengens) when this particular convergence of Torah readings occurred.

What's in a Name: Hardness

Hardness is one of those qualities which we are forever seeking to acquire and to rid ourselves of at the same time. There is more than a hint of condemnation when we describe a particular individual as a "tough" person, but no small measure of admiration as well. We denounce, in ourselves and others, behavior that is "obstinate" and "unyielding," but also agree on how important it is to have "backbone", to stand one's ground, and not be swayed from one's principles.

Indeed, our journey through life requires firmness as well as flexibility, hardness as well as pliancy. There are times and situations which necessitate, as our sages put it, to "be yielding as a reed, not hard as a cedar." Yet there are also times and situations when we are called upon to employ every iota of obstinacy and "stiff-neckedness" we can muster to resist all that threatens our integrity and seeks to deter us from our mission in life. In the words of Chassidic master Rabbi Bunim of Pshischa: "A person should have two pockets in his coat. In one pocket he should keep the verse, 'I am but dust and ashes'; his second pocket should contain the Talmudic saying, 'A person is commanded to say: For my sake was the world created.'"

This dual approach to life is implied in the Torah's two names for the tribes of Israel. While the people of Israel constitute one entity as G-d's "singular nation," they are comprised of twelve distinct tribes, each of which contributes its unique character and potential to our national mission. Thus, the Torah refers to Israel's tribes as shevatim, "branches," or matot, "rods," expressing the idea that they are offshoots from a common stem, distinct from each other yet parts of a greater whole.

While shevet and mateh are both synonyms for "branch," the shevet is a pliant, flexible bough, while mateh connotes a stiff stick or rod.

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Therein lies the deeper significance of these two names for the tribes of Israel: on certain occasions the Torah refers to us as "branches," stressing the need for flexibility and tractability in life. In other contexts we are called "rods," underscoring the need for firmness and determination in carrying out our mission as "a holy people" and "a light unto the nations."

The latter point is the lesson of the Parshah of Matot, which opens with the verse, "And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes..." Here, the tribes are called by the name matot — a designation which becomes the name of the Parshah and the crux of its message: that there are times in the history of a people when they must employ the fortitude and fixity of the rod, when they must find the inner resolve to "stick it out" in a hostile and capricious world.

The Staff of Exile

Hardness is an acquired, rather than an intrinsic, state. While the potential for hardness always exists, it is actualized when a substance is subjected to galvanizing conditions and influences.

This can be seen in the shevet/mateh model. As a branch, the shevet is supple and yielding, bending to the wind and to every pressing hand. But when it is disconnected from the tree to face the elements as a lone, rootless rod, it stiffens into a mateh.

In other words, a mateh is a shevet hardened by the experience of galut. Deprived of tenderizing moisture from its nurturing roots, the latent hardness of the wood asserts itself, transforming the pliant branch into a rigid staff.

Therein lies the connection between the Parshah of Matot and the time of year in which it is read. During the Three Weeks, we mourn our exile from our homeland and the removal of G-d's open presence in our lives as it was revealed in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

We remember how the shevatim of Israel — a people anchored to their roots, vitalized by an uninterrupted flow of spiritual nurture through their limbs — were torn from their tree to become a nation of homeless matot.

But even as the Torah commands us to mourn the events of the Three Weeks, it insists that our mourning be a constructive endeavor, an opportunity to focus on how our state of exile might be exploited to a positive end.

Even as we agonize over the rootlessness of galut, we must take advantage of the manner in which our disconnection from our natural environment strengthens us and galvanizes us. Even as we weep over the destruction of G-d's home and the absence of His revealed presence in our lives, we must tap the tremendous reserves of faith and fortitude evoked by the challenges of an alien society and environment — reserves which would not have been actualized were we to have remained a nation of shevatim undisturbed from their stem.

Forty-Two Journeys

But there is more to galut than the toughening of the Jewish soul.

Galut is also a journey. A journey is not just a departure from home — it is an advance towards a destination.

Indeed, this is the difference between a wanderer and a journeyer: the wanderer is escaping or being driven away from some place, while the journeyer is going to someplace. The wanderer is defined by where he is not, by the state and experience of homelessness and what this does to his inner self; the journeyer is defined by the place or places to which he goes and what he achieves there.

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When the wanderer and the journeyer return home, the wanderer brings back his "hardened" and matured self, while the journeyer brings the treasures procured at the various points of his itinerary.

What are we seeking in our places of exile? What will we bring home with us when we return from our journey to the ends of earth? The Talmud defines the purpose of galut as the acquisition of "converts." "The people of Israel were exiled amongst the nations," it declares, "only so that converts might be added to them."

These "converts" assume many forms. There are the literal converts — non-Jews who were included in the community of Israel as the result of our contact with the peoples of the world. More significantly (since the Torah neither instructs nor encourages us to seek converts to Judaism), there is the more subtle conversion of a pagan world to the monotheistic ethos and ideals of Torah, achieved by our centuries and millennia of galut amongst the nations of the world.

The Kabbalists explain that the "converts" gained in the course of our galut are not only of the human sort, but also include the souls of all creatures and creations with which we have come in contact in the course of our dispersion to all corners of the globe. For every created entity has at its core a spark of holiness, a pinpoint of divinity that constitutes its soul — its function within G-d's overall purpose for creation. Every time we utilize something — be it a physical object or force, an idea or a cultural phenomenon — to serve the Creator, we penetrate its shell of mundanity and realize its divine essence. This, the Talmud is saying, is the purpose of our galut: to redeem the sparks of holiness which lie buried in the most far-flung places and circumstances.

This concept of galut is expressed by the second Parshah of our pair, the section of Massei ("journeys"), which chronicles the travels and encampments of the people of Israel in the Sinai desert.

The Parshah's name derives from its opening verses: "These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out from the land of Egypt... And they journeyed from Raamses... and they camped at Sukkot. They journeyed from Sukkot, and camped at Eitam..." Massei goes on to list the 42 journeys which comprised Israel's travels from Egypt to Mount Sinai to the Holy Land.

The commentaries explain that these "journeys" are the forerunners and prototypes for the historical saga of Israel, as we advance through "the desert of the nations" (as the prophet Ezekiel refers to the galut) to our ultimate "entry into the Land" in the age of Moshiach.

It is significant that the Torah refers to our ancestors' travels as "journeys" in the plural — a plurality that is preserved in the name of the Parshah. If the purpose of galut were to lie solely in its rootlessness and what this brings out in the Jewish soul, then it should be defined as a "wandering" rather than a "journey"; and if its purpose were to lie exclusively in its ultimate "entry into the Holy Land" at galut's end, then our sojourn in the "desert of the nations" should be regarded as a single journey, not a series of journeys. The fact that the Torah considers galut to be Massei, "journeys," means that the purpose of galut is to be found also, and primarily, in the places to which it brings us, so that each of its travels is a journey and each of its "encampments" is a destination.

Integration

Both Matot and Massei are Parshiot read during the Three Weeks — both are lessons on galut. On the face of it, however, they seem to be different, even conflicting, insights into the nature and purpose of our exile. Matot instructs us on how the purpose of galut is to evoke in us the steadfastness and immobility of the branch-turned-rod. Massei, on the other hand, regards galut as a journey — as movement, change and transformation.

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Indeed, virtually everything in our existence is multifaceted, and "life" is the endeavor to navigate, rather than to eliminate, its paradoxes. If "sticking to your principles" and "changing the world" seem conflicting goals, so be it; we nevertheless pursue them both, exercising our judgment and sensitivity as to which of these objectives should be emphasized in a given circumstance. So one week we dwell on the Matot aspect of galut, regarding the challenges of its alien environment as something to resist and repel — thereby strengthening our resistance and hardening our inner resolve. And the next week we focus on the Massei approach to exile, exploring the ways in which our interaction with our environment serves to elevate it and transform it into a holier and more G-dly place.

But what happens when Matot and Massei unite into a single Torah-reading? Then the "directive of the week" is to integrate them both into a single approach to galut. "Living with the times" in such a week means discovering how your interaction with a hostile environment is not a challenge to your values and convictions, but their strengthening and their affirmation. It means discovering how your "toughness" and intractability in your faith is not a hindrance to achievement and creativity, but actually an aid in your endeavor to transform the corner of the world to which you have been dispatched on the mission to build a home for G-d. ❖

(Matos-Massei completes the 4th Book of The Torah: Bamidbar)

From Our Sages

Moses spoke to the people: "Arm yourselves . . . to take G-d's vengeance on Midian" (Numbers 31:3)

G-d had said to Moses, "Avenge the vengeance of the children of Israel upon the Midianites"; yet Moses said: "To take G-d's vengeance on Midian"!

G-d said to Israel: It is you who have an account to settle with them, for they caused Me to harm you. But Moses said: Master of the worlds! If we had been uncircumcised, or idol worshippers, or had denied the mitzvot, 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; and so I say: "To take G-d's vengeance on Midian."

-- (Midrash Tanchuma)

"To take G-d's vengeance on Midian"—for whoever stands against Israel, stands against G-d.

-- (Rashi)

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.

-- (The Chassidic Masters)

Moses said to them . . . "Build cities for your young, and sheepfolds for your sheep" (Numbers 32:20, 24)

They, on the other hand, had said, "We will build sheepfolds here for our sheep, and cities for our young" (v. 16), giving precedence to their cattle over their children. Said Moses to them: Not so! Make the primary thing primary, and the secondary thing secondary.

-- (Rashi)

Haftarah for Matos-Massei (2nd Shabbos of the Three Weeks) in a Nutshell

Jeremiah 2:4–28; 4:1–2

This week's haftarah is the second of a series of three "haftarot of affliction." These three haftarot are read during the Three Weeks of mourning for Jerusalem, between the fasts of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av.

The prophet Jeremiah transmits G-d's message to the Jewish people, in strong tones chastising all the sectors of the people, including the leadership, for their abandonment of G-d. "What wrong did your forefathers find in Me, that they distanced themselves from Me, and they went after futility and themselves became futile?" He reminds them of the kindness G-d did for them, taking them out of Egypt and leading them through the desert and settling them in the Promised Land, yet they repaid kindness with disloyalty. "For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the spring of living waters, [and furthermore, this was in order] to dig for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that do not hold water."

G-d asks them to view the actions of their neighboring nations, the Kittites and Kedarites, "and see whether there was any such thing, whether a nation exchanged a god, although they are not gods. Yet My nation exchanged their glory for what does not avail."

Jeremiah then goes on to foretell the suffering the Jewish people will suffer at the hands of their enemies, and also their erstwhile allies: "Your evil will chastise you, and you will be rebuked for your backslidings; and you shall know and see that your forsaking the L-rd your G-d is evil and bitter."

The haftarah ends on an encouraging note, assuring the people that if they return to G-d with sincerity, they will be restored to their full glory. ❖

From all of us at Anshei-Lubavitch, we hope and pray for the safety and health of you and your loved ones. May the Almighty protect us all and send complete healing to those who need healing. And may our world very soon find the ultimate cure to all diseases with the coming of Moshiach, sooner than we can imagine.

"It would be desirable that you establish the custom of reciting Tehillim — at least a few chapters — in shul during the weekdays as well. Convey to the congregants the words that my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, related: that reciting Tehillim protects [a person] from many undesirable matters and draws down abundant good for the needs of every single individual."

-- Lubavitcher Rebbe

16 Iyar, 5711

Good Shabbos to all!

שבת שלום גוט שבת!

