Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 221

Matot Masei | The Land of Israel - Where G-d is Ever - Present





MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת מטות מסעי | אנגלית

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Beit Hamidrash Hameir La'aretz

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Parshat Matot-Masei - The Efforts of the Righteous against the Frankists



The Efforts of the Righteous against the Frankists

It was early on Friday night, between Kabbalat Shabbat and the Arvit prayer.

Eliyahu sat in the synagogue, studying from a book on the weekly Parsha that had caught his eye.

As he read, he noticed the following passage:

"It is written in 'Be'erot HaMayim' that it is a good omen to mention the holy Baal Shem Tov upon Motza'ei Shabbat (the culmination of Shabbat) and to recount his praises and his holy ways. This is beneficial and serves as a good omen for success and ample livelihood throughout the entire week, both materially and spiritually."

Thoughts filled Eliyahu's mind. "A good omen for livelihood — now that is something I need."

From now on, he resolved to tell a story about the Baal Shem Tov at every Melaveh Malkah (meal following the conclusion of Shabbat).

On Shabbat morning, when he woke up from the night's sleep, another idea popped into his head: "If I am already adding, spiritually speaking, to the weekly Melaveh Malkah, maybe I should invite my brothers-in-law as well to partake with me in this meal, and together with their words of Torah, our meal will have even more meaning and spiritual flavor."

Shabbat passed by quickly, and on Motza'ei Shabbat, when his brothers-in-law came over to his home, Eliyahu shared with them a tale that he had read in 'Aspaklarya

HaMe'irah' (Part I, p. 39):

Toward the end of the Baal Shem Tov's life, an evil cult known as the "Frankists" began to spread Parshat Matot-Masei - The Efforts of the Righteous against the Frankists

throughout Poland, plaguing the wider Jewish community.

At its head stood Yaakov Frank, a native of Korolivka in Podolia, who had been ensnared by the Sabbatean cult who had long since converted to Islam. After years spent in Turkey and Greece — steeped in Sabbatean influences — Frank returned to Poland in 5516 (1756 CE) and settled in the "Pale of Settlement" near the city of Lvov.

From there, he spread forth his venom, ensnaring both simple, unsuspecting Jews and heretical free-thinkers eager to indulge their basest desires.

Faithful Jewry, remembering the devastation caused by the earlier Sabbatian cult, joined forces — every community and ethnic branch — waging an all-out war on this destructive movement.

The Frankists, for their part, sought the patronage of Polish bishops and nobles, who were otherwise hostile to the Jewish communities in their territory.

The malicious incitement of the Frankists eventually led to a decree, issued at their urging, to burn all copies of the Talmud that existed in the country.

By divine miracle and through the Baal Shem Tov's lofty prayers on Yom Kippur of 5518 (1757 CE), that decree was annulled.

time, however, the In Frankists provoked their downfall: the Polish authorities who had previously supported demanded them now their conversion to Christianity, while those who refused suffered the humiliation of having half their beard and one sidelock shaved off, marking them as neither Jew nor Gentile. Ultimately, however, the rest of the cult yielded and consented to baptism.

The severance of this cult from Judaism brought relief and satisfaction to many, who saw it as a deliverance from further harm, and so community leaders wholeheartedly approved of this course of events.

Yet the Baal Shem Tov — who had fought this accursed sect and their devastating actions — preferred to defeat them

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through spiritual means rather than see them abandon their covenant with G-d and leave the fold of the Jewish people.

In his eyes, their apostasy wounded the Shechinah itself, like severing a limb from a living body.

Once he learned of their intention to convert, the Baal Shem Tov hurried to Premishlan to consult with his confidant, Rabbi Meir the Great, intending to annihilate this evil cult and its members through heavenly powers before their planned baptism.

Upon arriving in Premishlan, the holy Baal Shem Tov went directly to the home of Rabbi Meir, but did not find him there.

At the entrance stood Rabbi Meir's wife, holding in her arms their son, Aharon Leib, who was gravely ill, burning with fever.

"My husband, whom you seek, is expected back shortly from the Beit Midrash," said the Rebbetzin. "But meanwhile, may I ask your honor, the Baal Shem Tov, to bless my sick child with a complete recovery?" The visiting tzaddik paused, wondering how she had immediately recognized him, given that he had never before met Rabbi Meir at his home. Perceiving his confusion, the Rebbetzin explained:

"If I have merited, by Heaven's grace, to recognize Elijah the Prophet when he visits my husband, would I not also recognize your honor?"

"And what do you say?" the tzaddik turned to the feverish infant. "Perhaps you, too, can recognize me?"

"Indeed," replied the child.
"Your honor is Rabbi Yitzchak
Luria Ashkenazi (the holy Arizal)!"

"May you be healed and live!" proclaimed the Baal Shem Tov, snapping his fingers decisively, and already on that very day, the child's fever subsided, and he emerged from mortal danger.

When Rabbi Meir returned from the Beit Midrash, the two holy tzaddikim sat down together to deliberate on how to eradicate

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the impure and wicked sect from the world.

After lengthy discussion, it was revealed to them from Heaven that to fully confront this challenge, they needed to join forces with two additional contemporaries: Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch of Patek, Rabbi Meir's brother, and Rabbi Moshe, a shepherd residing in Rashkov.

Since they knew of Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch's identity, the two tzaddikim traveled first to Patek, where, at the city outskirts, they found Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch waiting by the roadside, his pack ready, expecting them; from Heaven the secret had already been revealed to him.

Together, the three continued to Rashkov to identify and find Rabbi Moshe, the shepherd, whose identity remained unknown.

After much searching, they discovered him tending flocks in the open fields behind the city.

He was a destitute shepherd, employed by the local livestock owners in Rashkov. Opinions regarding his essence remain divided to this day: some say he was a hidden tzaddik, greatly learned and spiritually elevated, and he merely disguised himself beneath the coarse exterior of a shepherd.

Others yet claim that he was genuinely a simple shepherd, ignorant from his infancy, neither learned nor versed, but burning within him was a sacred fire — a pure and sincere passion for the Creator.

Driven by an immense desire to serve his Creator, though unaware of the Torah's ways, he would roll down mountains, leap over ditches, and vault over rocks, declaring aloud that all was done out of love and for the glory of the Creator.

Either way, his pure-hearted devotion brought great delight to Heaven, ensuring that his prayers were accepted and the heavenly gates were always opened wide for him.

Thus united, the three tzaddikim and the shepherd

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embarked on their mysterious, sacred mission.

The holy Baal Shem Tov knew, as did the others who had joined him, that a fierce battle awaited them against the satan and his cohorts, who would not rest or relent in the face of their actions.

To avoid hindrance and obstruction, they chose to board one of many rafts floating upon the river near Rashkov, hoping that in the waters, surrounded by purity and in complete seclusion, they could fulfill their sacred task undisturbed.

Yet, shortly thereafter, all of Rashkov's bells began clanging loudly: a fire had erupted in the city!

Very soon, flames began to engulf the pasture fields before them, and Rabbi Moshe, the mystical shepherd, was struck by panic.

"Woe is to me!" he cried bitterly. "The sheep are abandoned in the field, and their responsibility rests entirely upon me; their owners will demand restitution — what shall become of me?"

The pleadings of the three tzaddikim could not calm the shepherd's terror, and he impulsively leaped from the raft, swimming frantically back to shore to save his flock from the spreading fire.

The satan's scheme had succeeded, "Our fellowship is broken," lamented the Baal Shem Tov bitterly. "Without the shepherd, we can accomplish nothing."

Soon after the fire erupted, the city's governor learned of the tzaddikim's gathering within his territory. Suspicion fell upon them as instigators of the fire, prompting the governor to dispatch a contingent of police to arrest and imprison them.

However, as soon as the police surrounded these holy men, they performed supernatural acts and vanished from sight, and only Rabbi Meir, who did not utilize his lofty spiritual powers, surrendered himself. Parshat Matot-Masei - The Efforts of the Righteous against the Frankists

The officers bound his hands and feet, threw him onto their wagon, and headed toward the prison.

En route, Rabbi Meir suddenly remembered he had forgotten his tefillin, and anticipating a lengthy incarceration, during which he prevented would be from performing this sacred mitzvah, he decided to use the very spiritual powers he had earlier declined to employ for his rescue, and he rose calmly and miraculously stepped down from the wagon, free from their grasp.

Disheartened and defeated, the tzaddikim left Rashkov, each returning to his respective city.

days, the Within accursed Frankists openly converted to Christianity, forsaking Judaism before the eyes of the entire world.

The Jewish streets rejoiced at the sorry outcome of the heretics, Mezhibuzh. but in sorrow prevailed; throughout the day, the holy Baal Shem Tov shed relentless tears, lamenting aloud:

"The Holy Shechinah mourns like a dove, proclaiming: as long as a limb remains attached, even if weakened, there remains hope, but once it has become severed. there is no remedy."

Eliyahu ended the story, and listeners quiet the sat in reflection and considered the tremendous spiritual might of the righteous.

Moshe of his one brothers-in-law shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"What's the matter, Moshe?" Eliyahu asked.

Moshe replied, "It's true that there is great value in praising tzaddikim, as the Pele Yo'etz writes:1

'It is a mitzvah to speak in praise of the tzaddikim and relate their good deeds.' Furthermore, it is recorded in the name of the Baal Shem Tov that speaking praises of about the tzaddikim is regarded as though

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one was engaged in the mystical workings of the divine chariot. When we share stories of the righteous, with faith and love of G-d our thoughts are purified, and it is possible to ascend from the realm of speech to the realm of thought.²

Nevertheless, I personally would prefer to hear words of Torah — words taught by these tzaddikim — something that truly 'satisfies' my soul, that strengthens my spirit, and gives me a clear path in the service of G-d."

Eliyahu was quiet for a moment, then said, "You're right.

And if you all agree, let us study the saying of our Sages: 'Proper conduct precedes Torah.'''³

"Do you think that we need to strengthen ourselves in this area?" Moshe asked in surprise.

"No, G-d forbid," Eliyahu hastened to respond.

"I didn't mean it in that common sense at all. I was referring to the chassidic interpretation of that saying.

But before we delve into that, let's have a bit of background on this week's Torah portion."

Five Commandments in One Section

This Shabbat, G-d willing, we will read the two joined Torah portions: Matot and Masei.

Parshat Matot contains 112 verses, and Parshat Masei contains 132 verses.

- **2.** As explained in Likutei Moharan (I, Torah 234).
- **3.** To quote the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah, 9:3):

"Rabbi Yishmael bar Rav Nachman said: Twenty-six generations of normal worldly conduct preceded the Torah.

This is what is stated: 'to guard the way to the Tree of Life' (Genesis 3:24) — 'the way' is Derech Eretz, which is followed afterward by 'the Tree of Life,' which is the Torah." Parshat Matot-Masei - One's Entire Body Immersed in It

Parshat Masei is divided into three general sections:

The first section (49 verses) summarizes the journeys of the Children of Israel in the wilderness; the second section (70 verses) deals with the mitzvot of the Land of Israel; and the third section (13 verses) is the final portion of the Book of Bamidbar and discusses the inheritance of the daughters of Tzelafchad.

Now, whereas in both the first and third sections, only a single topic is dealt with, in the second section, which discusses the mitzvot of the Land of Israel, there are five distinct topics — "five sub-sections."

Each sub-section opens with the words, "and G-d spoke to Moses, saying," and they are:⁴

- 1. Driving out the nations and abolishing idolatry.
- 2. Demarcating the land's boundaries and sanctifying it.
- 3. Dividing the land among the tribes through their chieftains.
- 4. Setting aside cities for the Levites.
- 5. Establishing cities of refuge (which Moshe had already begun to do on the eastern flank of the Jordan).

Each of these five directives is discussed in the Torah at length, but we will focus on one particular point mentioned in the first of these sub-sections (concerning driving out the nations and abolishing idolatry), namely the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel.

One's Entire Body Immersed in It

On the sixth day of Creation, the Holy One, blessed be He, created man from the dust of the earth, forming his body in such a way that it contained 248 (רמ"ח) limbs and 365 (שס"ה) sinews.

At Mount Sinai, we merited to receive from G-d the

4. This passage is an excerpt from 'Sefer HaParshiyot' (Bamidbar II, p. 433).

Parshat Matot-Masei - One's Entire Body Immersed in It

הרי״ג) mitzvot, which likewise is divided into 248 positive commandments and 365 prohibitions.

Our Sages reveal⁵ that each positive commandment corresponds to one of a person's limbs, and each prohibition corresponds to one of the sinews. When a Jew fulfills a particular positive commandment, he draws down spiritual light and vitality into the corresponding limb, and when he is careful not to violate a particular prohibition, he draws down that spiritual light and vitality into the corresponding sinew.

This applies to all the mitzvot without exception.

However, there are several mitzvot about which our Sages say they are equal in weight to the entire Torah; when a person performs them, in addition to the specific light that illuminates the corresponding limb, one also brings down an overarching light upon his entire body.⁶

One such mitzvah (that is equated with the entire Torah) is the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel.

This mitzvah is very easy to fulfill, yet its reward is exceedingly great, sanctifying and purifying all of a person's 248 limbs and 365 sinews.⁷

However, despite its relative ease to merit fulfilling it completely,

- **5.** See at length in Sha'arei Kedushah (Part I, Sha'ar 1).
- **6.** We similarly find several mitzvot which our Sages say are equivalent to the entire Torah:

The mitzvah of tzitzit, performing acts of kindness, circumcision, charity, the laws of the Red Heifer, observing Shabbat, and the mitzvah of sukkah (see 'Or Ganuz,' Part II, p. 208).

Among these, there are two mitzvot that apply to every Jew and are fixed and cannot be altered, namely Shabbat and circumcision. A Jew who is circumcised remains circumcised forever, and Shabbat is fixed in time.

7. G-d forbid that anyone should think that since settling the Land of Israel is equivalent to all of the mitzvot, it replaces them — and one no longer needs to keep Shabbat, eat kosher, and

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besides the obvious basic condition of actually living in the Land of Israel,8 certain additional conditions must also be met.

Joy and Intention Are the Foundation

The following is an excerpt from 'Chelev Ha'Aretz':9

When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave us His sacred commandments, He revealed through His servants that if we wish for these mitzvot to be complete, we must fulfill them in all of their aspects, namely (in ascending order):

Action, speech, intention, and a yearning of the heart.

Hence, one who desires to observe the mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisrael (settling the Land of Israel) in its fullness must do so in all five levels:

Action — residing in the Land of Israel.

don tefillin, relying on the merit of living in the Land of Israel.

G-d forbid to think so; that is complete folly and is a gross misunderstanding; of course, that is not the intention: the idea is that its merit corresponds to that of all the mitzvot, not that it substitutes for them; it is an addition, not a replacement.

8. Many years ago, I regularly studied in Jerusalem with a highly regarded Torah scholar.

One evening, we discussed the holiness of the Land of Israel, and he related to me:

"Once in my youth, while I was studying at a yeshivah, a few friends and I were sitting in the yeshivah's courtyard chatting.

One friend opened a bag of sunflower seeds and offered them to everyone, and we continued talking, cracking the seeds and tossing the shells onto the ground.

Suddenly, the Rosh Yeshivah — an elderly Jew — passed by, and when he saw us, he said:

"This is the Land of Israel! This is where the Divine Presence rests!""

The scholar added: "Almost forty years have passed since that moment, and even now, his outcry continues to resound in my ears."

9. Part I, p. 23.

Parshat Matot-Masei - Joy and Intention Are the Foundation

Speech — speaking favorably about the Land of Israel, praising and extolling its physical and spiritual aspects.

Intention — to be mindful that by residing in the Holy Land, we are fulfilling a mitzvah.

A yearning of the heart — by feeling genuine joy at having the merit to fulfill the will of the Creator and live in the Land of Israel.

In fact, the sanctity of the Land of Israel is primarily revealed in the hearts of those who consciously fulfill the mitzvah of settling the Land.

As the Pnei Yehoshua writes (Ketubot 111a):

The Gemara states in the name of Rabbi Elazar: "Whoever

dwells in the Land of Israel is considered free of sin."

It would seem that this applies specifically to one who lives there with the intent of fulfilling the mitzvah of dwelling in the Holy Land so that the merit of the Land of Israel protects him from falling into sin. In such a case, even if on occasion he does stumble in sin or commits a transgression out of spiritual weakness, the merit of residing in the Land of Israel spares him from retaining that sin overnight once he realizes that he stands in sacred land, he surely regrets his wrongdoing and repents, and is healed of his wrongdoings.¹⁰

Let us now move on to discuss a Chassidic dimension in our Torah portion, and we begin with a question.

10. We bring an excerpt from a talk delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel:

"The Land of Israel is exceedingly dear to G-d, hence His constant providence over it, as Scripture states: 'It is a land that the

L-rd your G-d looks after; the eyes of the L-rd your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year' (Deuteronomy 11:12).

It is out of His immense love for us that He granted it to us as a gift.

Parshat Matot-Masei - A Dangerous Misconception

A Dangerous Misconception

In the Gemara (Ketubot 110b), we find the following Baraita:

"Our Rabbis taught: One should always dwell in the Land

The Gemara (Ketubot 112a) tells that Rabbi Abba would kiss the dust and stones of the Land because he cherished it deeply; Rabbi Chanina removed obstacles from roads so the Land would not earn a bad reputation; Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi moved between sun and shade to avoid feeling resentment toward the land during their time living there.

Our Sages relate (Yalkut Shimoni, Devarim, Remez 852): Rabbi Yehudah ben Beteira, Rabbi Matya ben Charash, Rabbi Chanina ben Achi Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Yonatan once left Israel and reached a place called Paltus.

Remembering the forsaken Holy Land, their eyes filled with tears, they tore their garments and cried out: 'You shall take possession of it and dwell in it, and you shall observe and do [all that I command you]' (Deuteronomy 11:31 — 32).

They declared: 'The mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel is equivalent to all of the mitzvot in the Torah.'

But this love for the Holy Land must not remain abstract - every Jew must strive to establish residence specifically in Israel, even if this means sacrificing wealth, status, honor, and worldly pleasures found abroad. Better to labor hard and live simply in the Holy Land; one coin earned under the blessing and care of the Holy Land surpasses thousands of gold dinars earned abroad in foreign impurity.

It is unfortunate that some people find it proper to leave their families behind in Israel to earn better livelihoods abroad, causing severe harm and undermining marital harmony and spiritual bonds with their children.

Indeed, many return only to discover their home lives shattered and that their families have tragically moved on without them. Moreover, money earned abroad lacks blessing.

The proper approach is to reside in the Land of Israel, accepting whatever livelihood G-d provides, however modest, enabling one to maintain household order and oversee their children's education, which is the greatest gain of all.

Thus, even modest earnings in Israel bear immense blessing.

Fortunate indeed is one who merits truly loving, settling, and inhabiting Israel. Such devotion brings profound satisfaction to the Holy One, who grants immeasurable reward for this."

Parshat Matot-Masei - A Dangerous Misconception

of Israel, even in a city with a majority of Gentiles, rather than dwell outside the Holy Land, even in a city with a majority of Jews.

For whoever dwells in the Land of Israel is like one who has a G-d, whereas whoever dwells outside the Land is like one who has no G-d; as it is written, 'to give you the land of Canaan, to be your G-d'" (Leviticus 25:38).

The Baal Shem Tov of blessed memory, explained¹¹ that the term "is like one who" (ידומהי) can also be interpreted as "it only appears to him." Thus the Gemara can be learned thus: One who resides in the Land of Israel merely feels as though he has a G-d (which implies, ironically, that he is deficient in his connection to G-d), whereas one who lives outside the Land only feels as though he has no G-d (which implies, that in actuality, he indeed does have a G-d).

If so, these words of the Baraita are astounding; how could it be that living outside the Land of Israel would — on some level — be considered superior to living inside the Land?¹²

- **11.** These teachings were cited by his disciple, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye (Ben Porat Yosef, Parshat Vayeshev).
- **12.** The spiritual greatness of the Land of Israel is so immense that one requires great refinement to truly 'unite' with it. This being the case, how could it even be imagined that any place abroad could surpass it?

On this subject, Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin recounted (Sippurei Chassidim, Torah vol. 2, p. 129):

Two hundred years ago, Jews lived in the Land of Israel with tremendous self-sacrifice, surrounded by enemies and facing severe poverty.

Jews abroad had organized to send funds for their survival, and among these donors was Rabbi Shmuel Abba of Zychlin, who annually sent significant sums of money to the Land of Israel, particularly supporting the sons of the Rabbi Moshe of Lelov.

Once, a Chassid from Zychlin who had traveled to Israel returned with a letter addressed to Rabbi Shmuel Abba from one of the rabbis in Jerusalem. The letter complained about the substantial sums Rabbi Shmuel Abba was sending

Parshat Matot-Masei - A Dangerous Misconception

Before we continue, let us pose another question:

King David cries out in Psalms, "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of G-d" (Psalms 118:17) — begging, as it were, that G-d spare him the natural phenomenon of death.

This request is quite perplexing, for David himself

states in a previous chapter: "What man can live and never see death? Can he deliver his soul from the hand of the abyss forever?" (Psalms 89:49); for there is no human being who can escape death.

How, then, are we to understand his plea to be immortal?

Before we address that, let us preface with the following.

specifically to the sons of Rabbi Moshe of Lelov, questioning why they deserved more than other poor residents of Israel.

Rabbi Shmuel Abba read the letter and calmly responded, "In due time, that rabbi will see the truth."

Some time later, another letter arrived from that same Jerusalem rabbi. It read:

"A few weeks after I wrote my previous letter, I saw a man in my dream with a glowing, radiant countenance filled with extraordinary grace and dignity. He approached me, fixed his holy eyes upon me, and asked sharply, 'How could your heart allow you to write letters to tzaddikim, speaking negatively about the holy sons of Rabbi Moshe of Lelov?'

In my dream, I replied, 'But I see many shortcomings in them.'

The elderly figure responded, 'When a person lacks humility, he sees shortcomings in everything. But with humility, one finds merit in everything.

This was the lesson Yehoshua and Calev taught the Jewish people when confronting the spies' negative report: "The land is exceedingly good" (Numbers 14:7).

The Land was indeed very good, and your inability to perceive it stems from your lack of humility that is necessary — as it says, "Be exceedingly humble of spirit" (Avot 4:4).'

I awoke, remembering the letter I had sent to Rabbi Shmuel Abba, and resolved to cultivate humility within myself. Since then, I have recognized countless virtues in Rabbi Moshe of Lelov's sons and deeply regret what I had written about them."

Parshat Matot-Masei - The World Is (Re)Created Every Day

The World Is (Re)Created Every Day

The first chapter of the Book of Bereshit deals with the creation of the world, detailing how G-d created everything in six days and rested on the seventh.

Someone unacquainted with our sages' teachings might mistakenly believe that once the world was created, G-d ceased to be involved in its continued existence — imagining that the world remains standing by its own inherent force.

This, however, is a serious error, and it could not be further from the truth.

Were it not for the power of the Holy One, blessed be He — who brings the entire creation into being and sustains it at each and every moment — the world could not go on existing.

This fundamental principle was incorporated by the Men of the Great Assembly into the text of our daily prayers: "He, in His goodness, continually renews the

work of Creation each day." That is, in every single moment G-d renews all of creation, and if, G-d forbid, He was to halt His life-giving utterances even for an instant, the world would revert to nothingness, as it was before creation and vanish from reality.

This is true with every creature, every object in creation — whether mineral, plant, animal, or human; all were formed by the Ten Divine Utterances of Creation, and at every moment, the Divine word that brought each particular being into existence speaks yet again, telling it to exist anew.

If G-d were to cease speaking that word even momentarily, that creature would revert to absolute nonexistence, as it was prior to creation.

While this may well known or even obvious, we need to be reminded of this fact, and the very knowledge of this concept strengthens our resolve to G-d's service, which as Rabbi Nachman Parshat Matot-Masei - The World Is (Re)Created Every Day

of Breslov said:13 G-d created the entire universe because He desired a dwelling place in the lower realms. He therefore, constantly creates the world, places human beings in it, and commands them: "Make Me a dwelling below; build a place for Me within your heart, in which I can reveal My Presence; when you build a 'dwelling' for My sake within your heart, it will be considered as though you have created and sustained the entire universe."

Since constructing the inner dwelling parallels the creation

of the world itself, by the same token, the process by which the human heart is "built" follows the very pattern through which the world was formed. This, in fact, is why studying the teachings of the Arizal is so crucial, for his works essentially reveal the method through which we may rectify our hearts. 14

Having established this fact regarding all of creation, 15 let us focus single on a mentioned in the Torah regarding of creation in the beginning.

- 13. As explained in 'Ne'imot Netzach' (Part 6, 49:1).
- 14. To quote Rabbi Natan of Breslov (Likutei Halachot, Hilchot Tefillat HaMinchah, halachah 7, sec. 22):

"Therefore, whoever possesses a heart to grasp intellectually, when studying the writings of the Arizal, the holy Zohar, their commentators, and works that have appeared in our generation — perceives that all of the secrets of Kabbalah refer to the 'Divine image' in which a person was created."

In 'Siach Sarfei Kodesh' (Breslov, Part I, 606), the following quote is written:

"Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, of blessed memory, once referred to the Arizal's Etz Chaim as 'a mussar book' and commented: 'What a precious mussar work it is.""

15. To restate the above:

The creation of the world of constant state — "He, in His goodness, renews continually, daily, the act of Creation."

Likewise, for a Jew, the building of the heart involves a state of renewal; every new spiritual level he achieves is yet a new creation.

Parshat Matot-Masei - Vast Void and Darkness

Vast Void and Darkness

Before any beings were formed, the earth was "unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Genesis 1:2).

From within that dismal, dreadful void — within the all-encompassing darkness — came the creation of light: "G-d said: 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3).

Had the world initially been bright, there would have been no uniqueness or significance to "light." Only because of the state of darkness that preceded it did the concept of "light" become meaningful.

As noted, this process recurs daily — "He renews the work of Creation each day in His goodness" — and, broadly speaking, this is the reason for the alternation of day and night; the value and preciousness of "day" is derived precisely from the "night" that precedes it.

Now, just as this was so in the creation of the world, so too is true in each Jew's personal world; for the divine light to be recognized and appreciated, darkness often must precede it. Without an initial dark phase, the light might not be recognized or properly valued.

Darkness? What Does That Mean?

When you read about "darkness," you might picture a person drained of energy, weighed down by worries or other troubles, and consumed by pain.

Indeed, that is certainly a form and manifestation of "darkness," but it is hardly the only kind. To explain: A Jew has five general faculties: wisdom, emotion, thought, speech, and action.

Of these faculties, the terms "light" and "darkness" mainly relate to the emotional faculty, to feelings of the heart. When a person's emotions are refined and aligned with the divine will,

Parshat Matot-Masei - Darkness? What Does That Mean?

the individual experiences light; but if, G-d forbid, the emotions deviate from G-d's will, that person will experience darkness.

Therefore, whenever a person feels a desire of any kind — be it a craving for food, money, or other material desires — he is being drawn into the domain of darkness.

Similarly, whenever a negative trait arises within a person — anger, arrogance, despair, or depression — and that trait takes hold of him, he is pulled into the realm of darkness.

Sometimes, these negative emotions may become so overwhelming that a person's entire emotional world seems to revert to its initial state: "unformed and void, and darkness lay over the face of the deep" (Genesis 1:2).

In such a place — like the primordial void — the divine existence may be hidden, and one may sense no G-dliness; life becomes most bitter, with no vitality and no hope.

In such a case, there is no other way than to chop through the darkness with great force.¹⁶

16. In the Book of Psalms it states, "At midnight I rise to praise You for Your righteous laws" (Psalms 119:62).

The Gaon of Ostrovtza explained the following in 'Or Torah' (Kuntres Mishmeret Kehunah, p. 33):

"'Night' alludes to a person's darkness, such as if he has lost his wealth or similar.

At the beginning of the 'night,' a person typically musters his strength and encourages himself, for he still recalls the good 'day' that just was.

So, too, at the end of the night — it is famously darkest because it is just before dawn, as the verse says: 'Then shall your light break forth like the dawn' (Isaiah 58:8). In other words, one has to pierce through the darkness; even so, one takes courage, trusting that soon the morning light will shine and be revealed.

But at 'midnight,' things are bitter for a person. He is far removed from the past, having long forgotten the good times, but at the same time, it is still quite distant from dawn, and it is very hard to strengthen and

uplift himself at such a time.

Parshat Matot-Masei - A New Light Shall You Prepare for Zion

A New Light Shall You Prepare for Zion

In the primordial state of Creation, there was darkness, followed then by a new creation — a revelation of light — that soon came into being.

As it was in the creation of the world, so it is for every Jew: Before each new ascent, before acquiring "new vitality," one returns to an initial state of "darkness upon the face of the deep," experiencing a feeling of constraint and limitation in one's emotional world.

But then, from the depths of this darkness, one must rise and overcome it, meriting a new light.

To elaborate further:

In Likutei Moharan (Part I, Torah 25), we find some wondrous statements, including the following:

"Many of the pious err in this: suddenly, it seems to them that they have fallen away from serving G-d. In reality, this is no fall at all — rather, because they need to ascend from level to level, they encounter each time anew the impure powers — the desires, confusions, illusions, and obstacles that reawaken each time.

Each such time, one must gather fresh strength to subdue and break these impure powers and obstacles in each ascending level, but truly, this is no true fall at all." For this is the path: On every subsequent level that a person attains, they must effectively start all over again; each level comes with its own evil inclination and its own tests that serve to propel a person forward.

This is an important lesson: When the evil inclination comes and tries to overpower a person, it does not necessarily demonstrate that the person has fallen from their prior spiritual

It was King David, peace be upon him, who taught us that even in the 'midnight' of life — precisely then

— a person must hope, be strong, and believe that G-d will surely never abandon him."

Parshat Matot-Masei - A New Light Shall You Prepare for Zion

level; on the contrary, it is a sign he has actually ascended to a higher level.

entering the Before spiritual realm, one faces a "wall" of the evil inclination that one must break through in order to enter.

Every time the evil inclination comes to overpower a person whether it's over questionable money issues, struggles with devoted prayer, matters holiness, purity of thought, issues between man and his wife, or lying and gossip — whatever arises this often is a sign that the person has advanced a step, and now there is a new battle to fight.

As the Baal HaTanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, writes in the Tanya, in the section known as "Chinuch Katan":

"It is known to those who know the depth of the verses of Scripture, what is written: 'For seven times the righteous man

falls yet rises again' (Proverbs 24:16); this is especially true being that man is called a 'mover' and not one who stands still, and he is meant to go from level to level and not remain forever on the same level. Between one level and the next — before he actually reaches the higher level — he is considered to have "fallen" from the first.

nonetheless, Scripture But says, 'Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down' (Psalms 37:24); his fall is only relative to former level. his not in comparison to other people, G-d forbid. Because despite his fall, he still remains above anyone else by virtue of his service, and some trace of his first level still remains in him."

Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Shick explains:17

"Every Jew must strengthen himself greatly not to break under anv circumstance in the world.

Parshat Matot-Masei - The Holy Land of Renewal

Even if it seems to him that he had already achieved lofty divine awareness — and suddenly it all went dark, as he experiences one fall after another — he must not lose heart.

Rather, he should realize that now he is about to ascend to an even higher level, and that is why the impure powers fight him fiercely, for each time a person is on the verge of perceiving a new aspect of G-dliness, a mighty impure power arises, a power of illusions.

These illusions cause all negative desires, traits, and thoughts, and fool one into thinking, 'I've been laboring at serving G-d for days and years, yet I still stumble time and again into shameful desires. The impure powers overwhelm me, negative thoughts and foreign ideas assault me, and my animalistic drives beset me.

Maybe this means that G-d doesn't want me and has no need of my service.'

One must never think this. On the contrary, one must know that precisely now he is rising upward, and the higher he goes, the more these impure powers and illusions vie to overtake him, and only by being unyieldingly stubborn can one break these illusions and impure powers that surround him."

Every Jew who serves G-d must internalize this foundational principle: each new level a person reaches comes with new challenges from the evil inclination. True appreciation of the sweetness and delight of the Divine is not achieved in a single moment; it is a long journey filled with tests at each step and turn.

The Holy Land of Renewal

The Gemara (Bava Batra 158b) states: "Rabbi Zeira said: The air of the Land of Israel bestows wisdom."

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, of blessed memory, once explained:18

18. The above concept is interwoven from two teachings in Likutei Moharan (Part II, Torah 40 and Torah 78).

Parshat Matot-Masei - Spiritual Advance and Retreat

The 'air of the Land of Israel bestows wisdom' — through the atmosphere of the Land of Israel, one can be privileged to experience novelties in Torah, receiving a revelation of new Torah insight.

The reason for this is that G-d constantly looks upon the Land of Israel, as it is written: "It is a land that the L-rd your G-d looks after; the eyes of the L-rd your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year." (Deuteronomy 11:12).

Being that G-d's eyes are upon it at all times, the Land of Israel is sanctified, and its air confers wisdom.

The "eyes" here allude to wisdom, and thus, the constant

divine gaze upon the Land of Israel makes its very air enlightening.

From where does this divine attention, this aspect of the divine "eyes," come from, and what can it be attributed to?

It is generated by the souls of the Jewish people, in whom G-d takes pride, "Israel, in whom I take glory" (Isaiah 49:3).

It is for this reason that it is called the Land of Israel — for it receives its holiness through the glory and pride that G-d has in the Jewish people, "Israel, in whom I take glory."

Thus, one who merits to experience the holiness of the Land of Israel gains constant renewal.

Spiritual Advance and Retreat

Rabbi Nachman goes on to say that just as one must pass through a "primordial darkness" ("darkness over the face of the deep") between every ascending level, so too, once a person has attained new Torah insights in the Land of Israel, his emotional world can darken again, and he is, as it

were, "thrown out" of the spiritual Land of Israel.

His task is then to re-embark upon the path leading back to the Land of Israel, walking that road until he reaches the path upwards once again and attains another, even higher level of insight into the Torah.

Parshat Matot-Masei - Outside of G-d's Land

Although superficially it might appear to be a cycle that is repeating itself, this is not actually so; each time he re-enters the Land of Israel, he merits a higher and more wondrous Torah than before.

Now, because this trek, "the road to the Land of Israel," can be long and exhausting, Rabbi Nachman famously cries out:19

"There is no room at all for despair at all." No matter what, one must strengthen himself in every way possible; even if he has fallen to the lowest depths, as long as he continues to encourage himself on some level, he still has hope of returning to G-d.

After all this lengthy introduction, we can understand

the statement of our Sages: "Derech Eretz (proper conduct) precedes Torah" — explained with a chassidic interpretation):

"Derech Eretz" — literally "the path to the Land [of Israel]" - "Torah" — a new revelation of Torah.

Before attaining new Torah insight, one must walk the road leading to the Land of Israel, "passing through the great and awesome wilderness, the serpents, fiery snakes, and thirst where scorpions, there is no water" (Deuteronomy 8:15). One must endure all manner of darkness, sorrow, and anguish, but ultimately he is promised to finally arrive in the Land of Israel, and merit receiving a new depth and insight in the Torah.

Outside of G-d's Land

The Gemara (Ketubot 110b) says: "Whoever dwells in the Land of Israel is like one who has

a G-d, whereas whoever dwells outside the Land is like one who has no G-d" (Leviticus 25:38).

Parshat Matot-Masei - Outside of G-d's Land

The Baal Shem Toy of blessed memory explained:20

The term "is like one who" (ידומהי) can also be interpreted as "it only appears to him."

Thus the Gemara can be learned thus: One who resides in the Land of Israel merely feels as though he has a G-d, whereas one who lives outside the Land only feels as though he has no G-d.

According to that reading, someone in the Land of Israel thinks he has a G-d, while one outside the Land of Israel thinks he does not. Seemingly, this is puzzling — would it imply that outside the Land could be superior?

The Baal Shem Toy clarifies that because the Land of Israel is the place where a person grows acquires and new spiritual perceptions, from time to time, he is "cast out" of his lower level before attaining a higher one.

In that period of transition, he feels darkness surrounding him, and he may despair and imagine he has no G-d at all — that G-d has abandoned him. Thus: "One who dwells in the Land of Israel [i.e., on the path of continuous ascents and descents] feels as though he has no G-d."

Conversely, one who remains "outside the Land" — where spiritual there is no real movement — never experiences this "being cast out."

His religious life seems to flow calmly, undisturbed by inner battles or overwhelming temptations, and he erroneously imagine himself a great tzaddik, confident that he trulv does have robust а ascendant connection to G-d.

Says the Baal Shem Tov, that is mere illusion, "he only feels as though he has no G-d," he's stagnant and not truly advancing in divine service.

Parshat Matot-Masei - Falling to Rise Back Up

Falling to Rise Back Up

King David cries out: "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of G-d" (Psalms 118:17).

The Baal Shem Tov explains that "death" can mean a spiritual descent — a "fall" from one's level.

David thus pleads: "Master of the Universe, I know that before each ascent, there must be a descent, one that is akin to death.

But I beseech You: Grant me the ability to ascend from level to level without that fall in between. Let me ascend continuously, without interruption."

By the time dawn was approaching, the Melaveh Malkah of Eliyahu and his brothers-in-law had finally come to an end.

Those present recited Birkat HaMazon and went to prepare for the morning Shacharit prayers.

Shabbat Shalom!



Parshat Matot-Masei - Summary and Practical Conclusions

Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. One of the mitzvot that is considered to be equal to the entire Torah is the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel.

It is a positive command from the Torah to dwell in and take possession of the Holy Land; it is very precious to G-d, and he constantly watches over it, and out of His immense love for us He bestowed it upon us as a gift.

- 2. The sanctity of the Land of Israel is indescribably awesome and exalted, and the very Land of Israel is altogether different from any other place; we have no real grasp of its true holiness.
- 3. Although the mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisrael is supremely lofty and equated with the entire Torah, it is, in practice, quite easy to fulfill, with an incalculable reward.

Observing it elevates and sanctifies all of one's limbs and sinews, yet to fulfill it completely, beyond the basic requirement to merely live in the Holy Land, a few other key conditions must be met.

4. Those conditions are action, speech, intention, and a yearning of the heart.

Thus, one who wants to fulfill the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel in

its fullness must properly fulfill his obligations in all of these areas:

Action — residing in the Land of Israel.

Speech — speaking positively about the Land of Israel and praising and extolling its produce and virtues.

Intention — being constantly mindful of the fact that by living in the Land of Israel, we fulfill a divine command.

A yearning of heart — feeling joy of the heart, being full of happiness at the privilege of fulfilling the Creator's will by living there.

- 5. When one dwells in the Land of Israel with the intention of fulfilling the mitzvah of living in this holy place even if he sometimes might stumble in sin his living there will stir his heart to complete repentance. Thus, by the very virtue of residing in the Land of Israel, one will spend his days in an ongoing state of repentance.
- 6. Anyone who disrespects the Land of Israel faces severe consequences whether by derogatory speech or by adopting evil behaviors contrary to its holiness, like the customs of the nations.

One who verbally denigrates the Land of Israel is, in effect, casting away

Parshat Matot-Masei - Summary and Practical Conclusions

G-d's greatest gift; consequently, his punishment is grave indeed.

One who desecrates the Land in his deeds may find that the Land "spews him out" and that he is cast out to live in exile. Even if he remains physically in the Holy Land, his heart will be turned away from its holiness and his surroundings.

In fact, anyone who leaves the Land of Israel is called a "yored" (one who descends from holiness), but conversely, one who retains his holiness in the Land lives there in inner harmony.

7. There is no room at all for despair. A person must keep strengthening himself, no matter what happens, even if he has fallen to the lowest spiritual place imaginable. As long as he holds fast and does the best he can to repent and return, he still has hope of reconnecting with G-d.

8. Before one attains a new spiritual level, he must first grapple with all sorts of darkness, pain, and anguish — however he must remain steadfast and firm in his divine service. For it is only then, after enduring it all, that one merits rising to a much higher level and to receive the Torah from anew.



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1st of Av ,5785

_	Candle	Shabbat	Rabbeinu
City	Lighting	Ends	Tam
New York	8:00 pm	9:04 pm	9:29 pm
Miami	7:53 pm	8:47 pm	9:22 pm
Los Angeles	7:42 pm	8:40 pm	9:11 pm
Montreal	8:12 pm	9:22 pm	9:41 pm
Toronto	8:30 pm	9:37 pm	9:59 pm
London	8:41 pm	10:01 pm	10:09 pm
Jerusalem	7:25 pm	8:15 pm	9:09 pm
Tel Aviv	7:23 pm	8:13 pm	9:06 pm
Haifa	7:23 pm	8:17 pm	9:10 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:21 pm	8:17 pm	9:06 pm

Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of

HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

Even if you see a Jew that seems to be distant, being that he is a Jew, he is essentially a believer and should not be shunned or distanced

reach faith one needs To simplicity and sincerity, without these traits, one's faith will be lacking.

Sincerity is exhibited by those who do not ask questions, or seek to first understand everything, they most perfectly experience true faith.



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