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## Parashat MATOT- MASEI

1st Av 5775

Shabbat Begins 20:55

Shabbat Ends 22:09

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## COMMUNITY PARASHA SHEET



**Rabbi Jonathan Tawil**  
**Director TAL**

### NOT JUST ANY STONES!

There is never a dull moment in Israel!

Just this week a thief returned two archaeological treasures with a confession note - after apparently experiencing 20 years of bad luck. The 2,000-year-old sling stones were taken from the ancient city of Gamla in the Golan Heights in July 1995, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) said.

They were returned in a bag to the Museum of Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures in Israel's southern city of Be'ersheva, along with a note from the thief.

The note in Hebrew read: "These are two Roman ballista balls from Gamla from a residential quarter at the foot of the summit. I stole them in July 1995 and since then they have brought me nothing but trouble. Please, do not steal antiquities!"

The thief did not elaborate on the nature of his or her bad luck. But it's interesting to note that the stones were used by Romans against the Jews who were trying to prevent the conquest of the hilltop city. Perhaps herein lies the key to this persons 'bad luck'.

Judaism views telling the truth very seriously.

The Talmud (Sotah 42a) says that there are four groups of people that do not merit greeting the Divine presence. One of them is liars. The Ben Ish Chai (Ben Yehoyada ibid) explains that the liar's punishment is measure for measure: through lying they demonstrated that they sought to find favour in the eyes of men, and in doing so ignored the presence of the omniscient Almighty. Therefore, they do not merit being in His presence.

Parshat Matot relates the importance of speaking the truth.

"If a man makes a vow...he must not profane his word. He must do all that he expressed verbally." (30:3).

Along these lines the Talmud (Pesachim 113b) also says that there are three types of people that G-d despises and one of them is those that say one thing, while having completely different feelings in their heart.

On a very practical level it is clear that when a person accustoms himself to speaking truthfully, people come to trust him, as the verse (Mishlei 12:19) says: "A true tongue will be established forever." On the other hand, one who is a habitual liar will not be trusted, as the verse continues: "But a lying tongue, just for a moment". I.e. his believability is short lived.

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In 1994 a Japanese scientist Dr Masaru Emoto had an idea to prove that spoken words have a direct and verifiable effect upon water. He conducted tests where cups of pure water drawn from a spring were positioned in rooms. People were then placed in different rooms with the water and told to make positive or negative statements. A small volume of the water was then frozen at -25 degrees for three hours, after which the frozen water was removed and examined under an extremely powerful microscope.

The results were awesome.

Positive statements such as compliments, words of praise or affection caused the

formation of crystals in a clear and beautiful way. Whilst negative statements, insults, curses or angry words made the ice crystals form in a disorderly and bad looking manner.

Dr Masaru Emoto concluded "The world it shows is truth, and there is no doubt that many messages essential to our lives are hidden in it."

How powerful are our words! They affect the whole world around us. We may not see it but deep beneath the surface something is happening each time we talk. The Torah relates that when the Bnei Yisrael were to enter and conquer Eretz Yisrael, if they found that their house was hit with Tzarat (leprosy), then in certain circumstances the house would need to be dissembled and rebuilt.

## THINK, THINK, THINK!

What is the connection between the end of Parshas Pinchos and the beginning of Parshas Matos that discusses Nedorim, vows?

The end of Parshas Pinchos discusses the festivals and at the end it discusses Sukkos which is a time of extra happiness. There is a danger that this joy could cause people's evil inclination to lead them to sin. Therefore they would make nedorim, vows, to guard themselves from sin, as it says in Pirkei Avos (3:17) - "nedorim siyog laprishus", "vows are a protective fence". (Tzror Hamor)

How was the Jewish Army comprised?

The Midrash says that the possuk doubles over the phrase of "Aleph LaMatai", one thousand from each tribe, implying two thousand from each tribe. This was because for every soldier there was another man from his tribe that was tasked with davening for his welfare.

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Eventually the Canaanite-built houses that they occupied became plagued and the walls had to be dismantled.

If G-d was granting them the land as a blessing, why did they need to dismantle and rebuild so many houses?

The Zohar (3:50a) explains that when the idolaters built their houses, each stone was placed in the name and in honour of their gods. Desiring to eradicate idolatry from the Land, G-d plagued the houses so that their deconstruction would purge the idolatrous impurity. When the Jews then rebuilt their houses, they instead dedicated them in the service of, and as an abode for, G-d.

It is for this reason that we make a Chanukat Habayit - dedication of a house; whether one has built it, bought it or is even just renting it. Regardless of who the previous inhabitants

were, we inaugurate our use of the house by purging it of spiritual impurities through expressing our thanks to G-d for giving us the resources to obtain a place to live, while simultaneously affirming our dedication to use our home as an instrument for doing His will.

We get rid of all bad influences that might have been present in the building. We eradicate the effect that bad speech by its previous owners might have had on those walls.

In this way, our dwelling truly becomes an abode for G-d.

Via the mouth, G-d has granted us a powerful tool to connect with him and influence the world around us.

The thief in Israel thought he was just stealing stones, but perhaps (just perhaps!) these stones had been affected by the people throwing them and by their surroundings.

The only time the Torah ever tells us to distance ourselves from something is in relation to falsehood. (Shemot 23:7).

In telling the truth we emulate our Creator regarding whom it says: "The seal of G-d is truth" (Shabbat 55a).

The Sefer Chassidim (Sefer Chassidim s. 47) writes that one who speaks only truth can actually change destiny by decreeing something to happen—and it will.

Remember words are free; it's how you use them that may cost you!

As we end the book of Bamidbar and enter the book of Devarim (words) let us think before we speak, enhance the words that come out into the open and enrich our surroundings and the world we live in.



## A MATTER OF FOCUS

We find ourselves at a most difficult part of the year. "Yamei Bein Hameitzarim", the days between the straits, are a period of national mourning, a time of introspection and reflection on all that we've lost. Every year, this time coincides with the reading of our sidra this week, Matot-Masei.

Masei opens with a list of forty-two journeys the B'nai Yisrael embarked on throughout their forty years in the wilderness. As a point of information, this could be quite interesting for a historian - however, as we know, the Torah is not a history book, nor is it particularly concerned with superfluous detail. Rashi, picking up on this irregularity, offers a midrash which explains the inclusion of the travels of the Jews in the desert, revealing a subtle but profound lesson relevant both for our personal and national identities. Rashi explains that we can view each journey as if we and God were father and son, journeying back from a trip to see a doctor for a critical illness. "Do you remember that brook?" asks the father, pointing, "that's where the fever almost overtook you. And there, just by that rock, we had to rest for three days until you had strength to carry on." And so they continue, reminiscing about each stop on the journey to the doctor, and eventually to health. So too, says Rashi, must we view our journeys in the desert. At each place was a travail, a sorrow, a story. However, looking back on

those forty years, on the cusp of entering Eretz Yisrael, the journeys take on a new light. We have all experienced this phenomenon in our personal lives. When we're mired in a struggle, fighting with our very essence to survive - a downturn in business which sends us into debt, a familial dispute that threatens its very fabric, a surge of doubt about our lives directions - things can very often feel hopeless. "What was life like before this", we wonder, "and will we ever see the light of day again?"

A bit of perspective, however, can work miracles. When we have passed the obstacle and are on the other side, we suddenly realise that we would not be who we are, with the depth of personality, connection to others, and fortitude, if we had not persevered.

It is only in the ultimate failure that stumbles turn to permanent disaster.

A LIFE ACHIEVED THROUGH FAILURE AND ADVERSITY, BUT EARNED FOR ONESELF, IS A LIFE MORE VALUABLE THAN ONE LIVED IN GIFTED - BUT UNDESERVED - PERFECTION.

So, God tells us, "those journeys that we took together, they were hard. You fought by the skin of your teeth to survive, and many of you didn't. But you grew. And you learnt. And you strove. And because you persevered, the very tidal waves that threatened to overtake you have instead borne you home safely, better, wiser, stronger, and more complete than you were before."

This period of the year reflects those same journeys. We are mired in the blink of an eye

that we call history, the minuscule slice of infinity which we have the privilege to witness. To us, these days are indeed "*bein hametzarim*".

Astoundingly, the very halakhot of Tisha B'Av point us to a different ending. Tisha B'Av is a chag like any other - we don't say tahanun on either erev Tisha b'Av or on the day itself. Many people confuse this as a sign that Tisha B'Av is a chag "*L'atid lavod*", in the coming future - however, this is not the case. Tisha B'Av is a chag *now*, existentially - we simply don't possess the perspective to see it. We can turn to the Rambam to provide us with a further dimension of clarity. The Rambam writes that if a fast day is still being observed, it is a sign that the underlying issues which are addressed by that fast have not been properly understood and corrected. We are still fasting on Tisha B'Av, and we must ask ourselves the question - why? What is left to be done?

To be human is to fail. It is a choice that the primal Adam made in the Garden of Eden - a life achieved through failure and adversity, but earned for oneself, is a life more valuable than one lived in gifted - but undeserved - perfection. This is the same choice which God Himself made during *briah*, when he hid the primal Light, shadowing its presence from those to whom it didn't belong. What is critical, absolutely essential for the achievement of a life, is to never give up, to never stop struggling. It is only in the toil of life that true greatness is won, only out of the slow process of building that a true identity emerges. As Shelomo HaMelekh writes so powerfully, "A righteous person is one who falls seven times and rises". It is in the rising that everlasting life is won.

Every one of B'nai Yisrael's journeys were part of who they were, part of their ultimate achievement. Our struggles, each one, every day - the very backbreaking work of life, of connecting to God, of true *avoda* - these are our journeys, our "*masao*". The only question is, where do they lead?

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## Tales Of Tzadikkim HaRav Zion Abba Shaul

was so great that when he would see young children walking to cheder, their innocence and sweetness would cause his heart to swell with a love for all of Klal Yisrael.

Before going to bed each night, he would forgive all those who had wronged him during the day. He recited the night-time prayer "I hereby forgive all who angered me" not by rote, but with great sincerity.

Once, someone greatly offended Reb Ben Tziyon. "Did you recite the prayer that night?" a friend asked him. "To tell you the truth," replied Reb Ben Tziyon, "I found it very hard to forgive him. Twisting and turning in bed, I said, 'Hashem, my anger is justified. But what should I do? Skip the prayer?' "Then I sat up in bed and for a long time struggled to judge that person favourably. When I was certain that I no longer bore a grudge against him, I placed my head on the pillow and recited the prayer."

Reb Ben Tziyon's formula for developing and maintaining strong interpersonal relationships was based on simple arithmetic: Instead of calculating what others owed him, he would ask, "What do I owe others?" Then, enumerating all of the mitzvot between man and his fellow, such as "Love your neighbour as yourself," "Don't despise your brother in your heart," "Don't bear slander," "Don't harbour vengeance," he would say, "How can I be at odds with people to whom I owe so much?"

Ambulances speeding down Geula's Malchei Yisroel Street with their sirens wailing are, sadly, not an uncommon sight. Nonetheless, each time the wail of an ambulance was heard in the Geula-based Porat Yosef Yeshiva, its Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Ben Tziyon Abba Shaul, would bless the passing patient with a speedy recovery. Then he would quietly resume his shiur or studies. While it's impossible to know what effect these particular blessings had, it is well known that Reb Ben Tziyon's blessings worked miracles.

Why are your blessings so effective?" a student once asked him.

"Because I really love people," was his unassuming reply.

This love for his fellow Jew-Ahavat Yisrael-was an inherent part of Reb Ben Tziyon's every action. His love for others

## Dear Rabbi,



*Why is yogurt with live acidophilus and bifidus cultures kosher to eat if we are not allowed to eat bugs?*

*Good question. Now let me ask you one: Why are we allowed to breathe? Zillions of microorganisms are floating around in the air, and we swallow some with every breath.*

*The answer is: The Torah prohibits only bugs which can be seen by the naked eye. Organisms seen only with the aid of a microscope are kosher.*

*The logic is this: The Torah was given to human beings, not angels. Its laws are geared to normal human experience. Bugs we see in 'real life' are forbidden. 'Invisible' ones - which seem like they exist only in a laboratory - are not forbidden.*

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## THINK, THINK, THINK!

The tribes of Gad and Reuven requested to take their portions of Eretz Yisroel from the part of Eiver Hayarden.

Moshe then added half the tribe of Menashe. Why?

Ibn Ezra says that they also asked for this land with the others, but since they were not a whole tribe, they are not mentioned until now. The Shach says that Moshe decided to split a tribe so that there would be more of a connection between the Jews on either side of the Yarden. Chizkuni explains why specifically was Menashe picked: he was the firstborn of Yosef who caused his brothers to tear their clothes when the cup was found with Binyomin. Therefore he was punished in that his descendants were split.

Whose is the only yahrzeit mentioned explicitly in the Torah and why only him?

It was Aaron Hakohen's on the the first of the month of Av (33:38). The Ha'amek Dovor explains that he was the first one to do the avoda, and his death corresponds to the destruction of the place of the avoda, the Beis Hamikdosh, in this month.

Why the need to mention in detail all forty-two journeys of the Jews in the desert?

Had these journeys not been detailed then future generations would not be aware of all the miracles that took place in the desert. (Rambam, Mora Nevuchim, 3:50)

What is a benefit, according to some, when the Parshas of Matos and Masei are joined?

There is an opinion (brought in the Mishna Berura 428:21) to not pause between the forty two journeys. When these two parshios are read separately then these journeys are interrupted with the aliyah of Sheini. However, when they are joined, the fourth aliya continues until the end of all forty two journeys.

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**HALACHA**  
**Rabbi Dov Levy**

## THE 9 DAYS AND TISHA BE'AV

*As we enter the month of Av we intensify our mourning for the destruction of the Temples. The week Tisha Be'Av falls in is a period of even more intense mourning.*

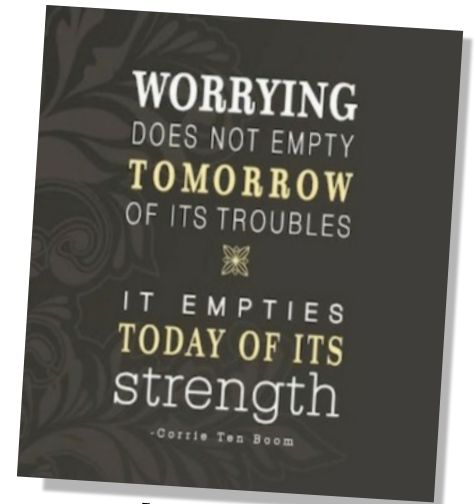
What restrictions apply from the beginning of Av?

Once Rosh Chodesh has passed (Motsaei Shabbat this year) we do not eat meat or drink wine (except for Havdalah). We also avoid court cases with Non Jews.

Tisha Be'Av is kept on Sunday this year. Is the week before considered the week Tisha Be'Av falls in?

Most authorities agree that this year there is no week of Tisha Be'Av. This means there are no additional restrictions in the week after Rosh Chodesh. However it is recommended and encouraged not to shave or have a hair cut in the week leading up to Tisha Be'Av in order to enter the fast day in an unkempt and mournful state. Furthermore, in past generations many Sephardim would various restrictions from Rosh Chodesh and so each should follow their own custom.

## QUICK QUOTE...



...Hmmm



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