



# Parshas Matos/Masei

For the week ending 26 Tammuz 5756  
12 & 13 July 1996

## Summary

### MATOS

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows — especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. The *Bnei Yisrael* go to war against *Midian*. They kill the five Midianite kings, all of the males, and *Bilaam*. Moshe is upset that women were taken as captives, because they were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not one casualty among the *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering, which is taken from them by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting). The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to remain where they are and not traverse the Jordan river into Israel. They explain that the land where they are presently located is quite suitable as grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of the *Bnei Yisrael*, and is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help the *Bnei Yisrael* wage war and conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

### MASEI

The Torah names all forty-two encampments of the *Bnei Yisrael* on their forty-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan river into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem commands the *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the *Canaanim* from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish all vestige of their idolatry. The *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the land completely of the *Canaanim*, those who remain will be pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides. The boundaries of the land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside forty-eight cities for the *Leviim*, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the land. Cities of refuge are to be established: someone who murders unintentionally may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of Bamidbar/Numbers, the fourth of the Books of The Torah.

## Commentaries

### SELF-MADE MAN

**“A thousand from a tribe, a thousand from a tribe” (31:4)**

More elusive than the Loch Ness Monster or the Yeti is a species called the Self-Made Man. Reports of his existence are very frequent, but to date he has never been positively identified. All the thousands of reported sightings have turned out to be mistaken wishful thinking.

Let's take a look at a typical reported sighting:

Morris is one of the biggest corporate stock whizzes on Wall Street. He is the president of Huge and Wealthy International Inc. - one of the top Fortune 500 companies. But did Fortune really give him his success. Or did it come from elsewhere?

It's all too easy to pat ourselves on the back and congratulate ourselves on how clever we were. In order to keep a true perspective as to where our success really comes from we need constant reminders.

In this week's Parsha, the Torah tells us that for every thousand soldiers that went out to fight for the Jewish People, another thousand stayed in *Eretz Yisrael* and prayed for them. In other words, for each soldier at the front, there was another 'soldier' responsible to pray for his counterpart.

You might think that this was to give those at the front added protection. **The real reason, however, was that those who were fighting shouldn't be under any illusion as to where their success was coming from.** It was not by the strength and the might of their own hand that they were victorious in battle, rather their success — like all success — comes from Hashem, the Maker of the 'Self-Made' Man.

*(Based on Rabbi Chatzkel Levenstein heard from Rabbi Yehoshua Bertram)*

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LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY

**“These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who went forth from the land of Egypt...at the hand of Moshe and Aaron.” (33:1)**

Nothing that the hand of man creates can endure for eternity. Statues crumble; poetry is forgotten. Nothing lasts forever.

For this reason, the redemption from Egypt was not final, for it came ‘at the hand of Moshe and Aaron’ and for all their lofty spiritual height, they were no more than flesh and blood.

It was inevitable therefore, that the Jewish People would be subjected to other exiles, for their Exodus from Egypt was mortal and this-worldly - and thus incomplete.

“These are the journeys of the Children of Israel” - these are the journeys of exile that the Children of Israel will undergo throughout the long night of history because “they went forth from the land of Egypt...at the hand of Moshe and Aaron.” However when Hashem redeems His people Himself, in His Glory and His Majesty, there will be no human imperfection in the redemption, and thus it will be complete and eternal.

(Kesones Ohr in Mayana shel Torah)

STATIC AND DYNAMIC

**“Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel...” (30:2)**

Matos and Masei are two Parshios joined together - but their names are opposites...

The word “Mateh” (of which the plural is Matos) can mean a staff. A staff is something inert, cut off from the tree from which it sprouted. It has ceased to have the power of furthering itself, of bringing forth new life. It will always remain what it is now. Static and unchanging.

Masei (from the verb ‘to journey’) is the opposite. It is the essence of dynamism, of development and growth. For the journey is the paradigm of furtherance...

Really, this juxtaposition of Matos and Masei is symbolic of the Torah itself. The Torah has the power to take the lifeless and change it into life - to take Aaron’s inert staff and cause it to flower and bloom. To change it into a serpent.

Nothing more than an inert staff becomes the instrument of the great signs and wonders wrought in Egypt, for splitting the sea asunder. Nothing more than an inert staff becomes the symbol of beginning of life itself for the Jewish People. The ultimate reversal of the lifeless staff - the Mateh - brings furtherance and an eternal future - the Masei - to the journeys of Children of Israel throughout history.

(Based on Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

**Haftorah: Yirmiyahu 2:4-28 & 3:4**

MUDDY WATERS.

**“For my people have perpetrated two evils: Me have they forsaken, the source of living waters; to dig themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (2:13)**

In this, the second Haftorah of the “three (Haftorahs) of affliction,” the prophet speaks out not only against Israel’s disloyalty to Hashem who saved them from slavery, but also against the disloyalty to the Torah which has been exchanged for the empty vanities of foreign culture. Our Sages teach us that Hashem lamented: “If they had forsaken only Me, but had kept the Torah, its spiritual light

would have influenced them to return to the path of righteousness.” However the Jewish People, seduced by the superficial glitter of the foreign ideologies, abandon the Torah, their only lifeline, and imbibe the brackish water of false ideas which constantly change and contradict themselves. From this only tragedy and exile can ensue.



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROH  
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE  
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

ELIYAHU HANAVI- תחבבנו חקת  
“ELIJAH THE PROPHET...”

And he shall return the hearts of the fathers to the sons and the hearts of the sons to their fathers

והשיב לב אבות על בנים v'hashiv lev avos al banim  
ולב בנים על אבות v'lev banim al avosam

The simple meaning of this passage, the last prophecy of the last prophet (Malachi 3:24) is found in the words of Rashi: “He will return the hearts of the fathers to Hashem through the children by saying to them in a manner of love and good will: Go speak to your parents to adopt the ways of Hashem. In similar fashion will he return the hearts of the children to Hashem through their parents.”

Another explanation is that in the golden era at the end of days, Hashem will bless the young with the wisdom of heart which comes with age, and bless the elders with the enthusiasm of heart which is the quality of youth.

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