

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 169

**Matot-Massei** | The Revelation of the Divine Presence - In the Land of Israel



# 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

# ...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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## **Parshat Matot-Masei**

### **The Severity of Disputes in the Holy Land**

**The** fame of the holy tzaddik, Rabbi Yisrael from Ruzhin, transcended the borders of his home country, extending even beyond the continental boundaries of Europe, reaching as far as the holy land of Israel.

This was true to the extent that many Chassidim who resided in the Holy Land packed their belongings, and traveled abroad to bask in the light and holiness of the great tzaddik of Ruzhin.

When Rabbi Hershele, a righteous young scholar and descendant of the holy Baal Shem Tov, was also taken by this yearning, the news spread rapidly and became the talk of the entire city.

All everyone spoke about was this pious man of distinctive lineage, one of the finest sons of the holy city of Tiberias, who

was to set out on the long journey to see and behold the great Rebbe of Ruzhin.

Many people flowed to Rabbi Hershele's home, both to bid him farewell and to wish him a safe journey, and to entrust him with notes bearing their names and those of their family members, to mention for a blessing before the tzaddik.

He, too, was moved by them, and warmly took their petitions.

On the Shabbat before Rabbi Hershele's departure, the excitement in Tiberias was palpable.

The congregants of the Chassidic synagogue in the city held a grand Kiddush in his honor, which was also attended by congregants from other synagogues in the city.

The synagogue overflowed with people who came to bid farewell to Hershele before his journey.

## Parshat Matot-Masei - The Severity of Disputes in the Holy Land

They came and went, entered and exited, sanctifying over wine, blessing over the challah, wishing each other "L'Chaim," and showering Rabbi Hershele with blessings.

After the guests had finished arriving, and Rabbi Hershele and his companions were about to leave the synagogue and head home, a group of latecomers from a small local synagogue appeared. Rabbi Hershele and his companion turned back on their heels and re-entered the sanctuary to greet these last guests.

As they sat, enjoying the food and chatting, someone suddenly asked, "Why were your synagogue's prayers delayed so much this week?" They grimaced, sighing deeply with frustration, and reluctantly spoke of a shameful dispute that had broken out in their synagogue, which had delayed the prayer.

A dispute about what? - another participant asked.

A dispute between two tailors - they answered - as our sages

say, "Every craftsman despises his fellow craftsman." (Bereshit Rabbah 19:9).

As they were conversing, Rabbi Hershele overheard the whole story about the dispute that had erupted several weeks ago between two simple tradesmen who had accused each other of trivial wrongdoings, each trying to magnify the other's faults.

'Disputes are like a pipe of a water valve - as it flows, it widens' (Sanhedrin 7b), their argument had soon greatly escalated: whispers turned to talks, talks to shouts, shouts to curses, and curses to insults.

Earlier today, just before the Torah reading, their dispute flared up again, causing a lot of disgrace and anger. The other congregants spent a long time trying to separate them, which is why the prayers ended so late.

Everyone who stayed and heard about this unfortunate incident expressed their hopes that it wouldn't happen again. Once the guests had finished eating and

**Parshat Matot-Masei - The Severity of Disputes in the Holy Land**

chatting, they recited the after-blessings and began to leave.

Rabbi Hershele and his entourage also rose and followed them out to their homes.

After Shabbat, when the day came for Rabbi Hershele to depart, a long line of friends accompanied him until his donkey was out of sight. Rabbi Hershele set out toward the coast of Acre, where he boarded a ship bound for Turkey.

Weeks upon weeks Rabbi Hershele was tossed on stormy seas and was dragged by carriage wheels, until he was fortunate enough to behold the radiant countenance of the exalted tzaddik.

On all the paths he traversed, his mind and thoughts were solely focused on the anticipated meeting with the man of G-d.

Rabbi Hershele engaged in purifying his soul, deepening his thoughts on the Divine, and pursuing even greater sanctity in his actions, all to prepare himself and be a 'ready vessel' for the spiritual influences the tzaddik would bestow upon him.

The magical landscapes that he traversed, did not capture his heart, just as the perilous seas he encountered did not disturb his thoughts.

All of Rabbi Hershele's contemplations and musings were solely focused on the higher worlds and the perfect service of the Creator, and nothing else held any value to him.

He was completely immersed in Torah, prayer, and profound intellectual endeavors, and even the sailors and travelers who shared in his journey by ship, and the carriage drivers who accompanied him on land, recognized his reservation and preoccupation and regarded him with reverence and sanctity.

On the awaited day, Rabbi Hershele stepped onto the courtyard of the tzaddik from Ruzhin, and there was no one happier than him.

The news of the arrival of the tzaddik from Tiberias, the descendant of the holy Baal Shem Tov, had preceded him.

## Parshat Matot-Masei - The Severity of Disputes in the Holy Land

The caretakers and the household members were already instructed and stood ready to greet the distinguished guest with all due honor.

With great joy, the Ruzhiner tzaddik advanced to meet the guest, who stood with awe, and seated him at his right.

A lavish meal was prepared and placed on the table in his honor, and the Ruzhiner tzaddik began to inquire about the welfare of the Holy Land in general, and of the holy city of Tiberias in particular.

'What news do you bring with you from the holy city of Tiberias?' - the tzaddik asked with emphasized interest.

'There is nothing new under the sun' - the guest replied shyly - 'the world goes on as usual.'

The Ruzhiner tzaddik was not satisfied with the vague answer and continued to press:

'Surely in a place like Tiberias, there must have been some news in recent weeks,' he mused, half

stating, half questioning, 'some occurrence, some event. Please, recall and tell.'

Rabbi Hershele's thoughts, which had been abstracted from worldly matters for weeks and entirely immersed in higher planes, struggled to recall any particular events from the happenings of the city of Tiberias.

Yet, under the persistent urging of the tzaddik, he began to make an effort and tried to dredge up some fragments of memories from the recent days before they had parted from his city.

Well, I remember - Rabbi Hershele answered after a long reflection, hoping to satisfy the tzaddik's curiosity - about three months ago, one of the respected members of the Sephardic community in Tiberias introduced a beautifully adorned Torah scroll into their study hall, and all the Jewish communities, from all corners of the Galilee distinguished guests came to participate in the magnificent celebration, even from the Holy City of Jerusalem.

**Parshat Matot-Masei - The Severity of Disputes in the Holy Land**

The entire Galilee dressed in festive attire in honor of the event, and greatly honored the Torah.

"Indeed, an important event," - the tzaddik concluded - "But surely other events occurred as well: Please remember."

Rabbi Hershele was filled with wonder. It seemed that the tzaddik was intent on hearing about some specific event, yet he could not remember any special event that would have merited any great interest from the tzaddik.

Once again, the guest gathered his thoughts again, and began to recount another event that had occurred a few months earlier:

A dangerous band of Arab bandits had been terrorizing the road between Tiberias and Safed for three years, causing fear among the people of the Galilee. When the local authorities finally captured them, there was a great sense of relief, especially among the Jewish community.

Rabbi Hershele looked at the tzaddik's facial expression to see if

he had satisfied his curiosity with this story, but it did not seem so.

"No, no." - the tzaddik replied - "I am referring to an event that happened just recently. An event that shook and rattled all the higher worlds."

Rabbi Hershele was surprised. He reckoned that if an 'event' of great magnitude had indeed occurred, he would have known and remembered it very well.

"Could it have happened after I left the city?" - Rabbi Hershele pondered aloud.

"Most likely, you were still there," - the Ruzhiner responded with a mysterious tone.

"If so," Rabbi Hershele replied, feeling at a loss, "let me recount all that I remember from the recent days before I departed, and the Rabbi will determine which event he is referring to."

Rabbi Hershele began to convey, and as he shared what had happened on his last Shabbat in the city and the grand Kiddush organized in his honor at the

## Parshat Matot-Masei - The Severity of Disputes in the Holy Land

synagogue, it was evident that the Ruzhiner tzaddik sharpened his ears and became very attentive to the words of the guest.

Rabbi Hershele did not understand what was so special about these stories, but continued to detail the unfolding events.

"As we were about to leave the synagogue," Rabbi Hershele continued, "another group of Jews, who pray in one of the smaller synagogues in the city, arrived. We turned back in their honor and returned to raise a glass and partake of some of the Shabbat delights."

At this point, the tzaddik, who had been listening intently to the words of the guest until now, interjected: "And why did they arrive so late?"

"Ah," Rabbi Hershele began, scratching his head and trying to recall that incident he had heard about at the time, "some dispute had broken out among them involving two tailors."

"Oh, ok." - the tzaddik perked up - "Indeed, that is the event I

was referring to. What exactly happened there?"

Rabbi Hershele widened his eyes in disbelief and looked at the tzaddik sitting beside him as if he could not believe his ears.

"Well, please do tell us," - the tzaddik urged him.

"As I heard," Rabbi Hershele replied, still with a look of bewilderment - "their dispute had started about some trivial matter, but since they are not very refined or particularly wise, it very quickly escalated to a full-blown physical confrontation, to the point where it was necessary to separate them."

"Oh, woe unto my ears," the tzaddik moaned from the depths of his heart, "all the heavens and the highest spheres were disturbed and trembled because of this dispute, and the entire celestial assembly was shaken by it."

"Why so?" - Rabbi Hershele dared to ask, after he could no longer contain the immense curiosity that filled his entire being.



**Parshat Matot-Masei - Rejoicing With the Land of Israel**

"Know this," the Ruzhiner tzaddik replied, "that a dispute in the Holy Land, G-d forbid, even between two simple tailors like these, makes a terrible impression and causes an uproar in the upper worlds, much more so than a dispute outside the Holy Land, even between great leaders."

Rabbi Hershele sat dumbfounded, as a chill and tremor filled his entire body.

"The Land of Israel is an entirely different reality, and we have no grasp of its holiness.

Suffice it for us to know that our sages have revealed that the 'ground' of the Land of Israel is holier even than the 'heavens' outside the Holy Land.<sup>1</sup>

(Rabbi Mordechai Gerlitz, 'Besod Avadecha', Part 4, page 101 - reprinted with the author's permission).

## **Rejoicing With the Land of Israel**

**One** of the great disciples of the Chassidic master, the author of 'Yesod Haavodah' from Slonim, was Rabbi Yehuda Leib Castelnitz.

He had a fiery soul and an intense personality, and served as a scribe and recorded the holy

sayings of the 'Yesod Haavodah', being abundantly endowed with knowledge in both the revealed and the mystical parts of the Torah.

Under the tutelage of his master, Rabbi Yehuda Leib achieved sublime spiritual elevations, elevating him to a very high level.

### *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

**1. The** teaching that the "ground" of the Land of Israel is holier than the "heavens" outside of it originates from rabbinic literature. One of the earliest sources for this concept is found in the Talmud, specifically in **Ketubot 111a**, which discusses the unique spiritual status and sanctity

of Eretz Yisrael compared to other lands.

**Additionally**, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in his work "Nefesh HaChaim" (Gate 4, Chapter 13) also emphasizes this idea, explaining the profound holiness of the Land of Israel as surpassing even the spiritual heights of the heavens outside the land.

## Parshat Matot-Masei - Living the Holiness of the Land

One day his master (the 'Yesod Haavodah') called him and said: "I want you to go up to the Land of Israel."

Rabbi Yehuda Leib traveled to the Holy Land, and settled in the city of Tiberias.

One day, Rabbi Yehuda Leib needed to send a letter abroad, and the cart carrying the mail was supposed to leave at dawn. He went before morning prayers to the cart square, and found that the cart had not yet arrived. He had to wait there, among the carters and the horse droppings, a place

where it is forbidden to ponder on matters of Torah and sanctity, and his refined soul was repulsed. He thought sorrowfully: "What am I doing here?"

Then he suddenly said to himself: "If they were to offer my holy Rabbi to come to the Holy Land for just half an hour, even if he had to stand right here, in this repulsive place, how happy he surely would be, as though he received all the treasures in the world." And was at once optimistic and encouraged.<sup>2</sup>

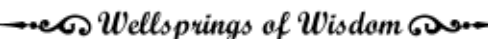
## Living the Holiness of the Land

**On** the sixth day of creation, G-d created man from the dust of the earth and arranged his body in such a way that it contained 248 organs and 365 sinews.

At Mount Sinai, we were privileged to receive 613 commandments from G-d, which are also divided into 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments.

Our sages taught that each positive commandment corresponds to one of the body's organs, and each negative commandment corresponds to one of the sinews.

When a Jew fulfills a commandment, he draws divine light and vitality onto the corresponding organ. Similarly, when he refrains from violating a negative commandment, he draws



2. 'Ma'ayan HaShavua' (Bamidbar, Page 653).

Parshat Matot-Masei - Living the Holiness of the Land

divine light and vitality onto the corresponding sinew.

This is true for all commandments.

However, there are some commandments that our sages said are equivalent to the entire Torah. When a person fulfills them, in addition to the light he draws upon the corresponding organ, he also draws a general light upon his entire body.

One of these commandments is the commandment of settling the Land of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

This commandment is very easy to fulfill, its reward is immense and lofty, and it sanctifies and purifies all 248 organs of a person.<sup>4</sup>

But, although it is easy to fulfill, in order to merit and fulfill it completely, several conditions are required.

*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

**3.** Many years ago, I studied in Jerusalem with a great scholar.

**We** would study regularly at night. One night, we were engaged in the topic of the holiness of the land of Israel, and he told me:

**Once**, in my youth, when I was studying in yeshiva, a few friends and I were sitting in the yeshiva courtyard, chatting.

**One** of the friends opened a bag of sunflower seeds and offered them to all of us. We continued the conversation and cracked the seeds and threw the shells on the ground.

**Suddenly**, the head of the yeshiva, an elderly Jew, passed by.

**When** he saw this sight, his whole body began to tremble: How can you litter the holy ground of the Land of Israel? This

is the Land of Israel, the dwelling place of the Divine Presence!

**The** scholar continued:

**“Almost** forty years have passed since then, and to this day, his cry echoes in my ear.”

**4. G-d** forbid to think that being that it is equivalent to all the commandments, it replaces all the commandments.

**Thus**, one would not need to keep Shabbat properly, not need to be strict about kosher food, not need to be careful to lay tefillin, as long as one dwells in the Land of Israel. G-d forbid to think so! This is a great folly, a great mistake.

**Obviously**, this is not the intention. The intention is that its virtue is equivalent to all the commandments, but it is not in place of, it is not a substitute, it is a wonderful addition.

## Intentional Living in Israel

**In** 'Chelev Ha'aretz' (Volume 1, Page 21), we wrote as follows:

When G-d bestowed His holy commandments upon us, He revealed to us through His servants that if we desire the commandments to be complete, we must fulfill them in all five of their aspects, namely: deed, speech, intent, thought, and the feelings of the heart.

Likewise, one who wishes to fully observe the commandment of settling the Land of Israel must be careful in all five of these aspects:

**Deed:** Living in the Land of Israel.

**Speech:** Speaking good of the Land of Israel, and praising its holiness and greatness.

**Intent:** One must have the intention that in his dwelling in the Land of Israel, he is fulfilling a commandment.

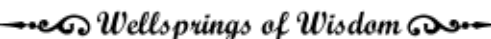
**Thought:** To constantly think positively of the Holy Land.

**Feelings of the Heart:** This is the feeling of joy, to be joyful and happy that one is fulfilling the will of his Creator by living in the Land of Israel.

To quote the 'Pnei Yehoshua' (Ketubot 111a):

“Rabbi Elazar said, anyone who lives in the Land of Israel resides without sin - it seems that this specifically applies to someone who lives there for the sake of the commandment of settling the Land of Israel, which is a place of holiness, so that the merit of the Land of Israel might shield him so that he does not come to sin.

Even if he then might commit a sin or even an intentional offense due to his evil inclination overpowering him, nonetheless the merit of living in the Land of Israel most likely prevents the sin from remaining in his 'possession', for after one sins and finds himself standing on Holy Land, he surely will repent for his deeds.<sup>5</sup>



5. In a talk delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, of blessed memory, he said:

**We** must know that the Land of Israel is very dear to the Holy One, blessed be He,

## Parshat Matot-Masei - Intentional Living in Israel

and therefore His providence is always upon it, as it is said: "A land which the L-rd your G-d looks after continually, the eyes of the L-rd your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Deuteronomy 11:12).

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

**Therefore**, when the spies returned and spoke against the Land of Israel, the L-rd's anger burned against them, and He refused to forgive them in any way, and He caused them to die a harsh and unusual death, as it is written: "The men who brought the bad report about the land died of a plague before the L-rd" (Numbers 14:37).

**The** rest of the people who heard their words and let them enter their hearts were decreed to die in the wilderness and not to merit entering the land.

**By** speaking against the land, they landed into the category of fools. For the definition of a fool is: "one who loses everything given to him" (Chagigah 4).

**Since** they despised this precious gift and cast it behind their backs, they were truly fools.

**Beyond** that, by disgracing the gift, they also disgraced the giver of the gift - the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, and therefore their punishment was severe and bitter.

**Years** passed, and the lessons learned from the sin of the spies were etched in the hearts of the Jews.

**The** Land of Israel became the cherished land, the land that held a central place in the heart of every Jew.

**Some** examples from the words of our sages:

**The** Talmud says (Ketubot 112a), that Rabbi Abba would kiss the soil and stones of the Land of Israel out of his great love for the land, and Rabbi Chanina would remove the obstacles from the roads out of his deep feelings for the land, so that nothing negative be said about its roads.

**It** is said about Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Assi that in the summer they were particular to move and sit in the shade when the sun reached where they were sitting and studying, and in the winter, they would move from the shade and sit in the sun, all to ensure they would not come to utter a complaint about residing in the Land of Israel.

**The** Yalkut Shimoni (Deuteronomy, 885) recounts "An incident involving Rabbi Yehuda ben Betera, Rabbi Matya ben Charash, Rabbi Chanina the nephew of Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Yonatan who all traveled abroad. When they reached Paltus and remembered the Land of Israel, they raised their eyes, tears flowed from their eyes, and they tore their clothes.

**They** interpreted the two adjacent verses: 'You shall inherit it and dwell in it. And you shall keep and fulfill the commandments' (Deuteronomy 11:31-32), and said: 'Dwelling in the Land of Israel is equivalent to all the commandments in the Torah!'"

**Parshat Matot-Masei - Moses, the First Redeemer**

Before we move on to let us introduce another  
this week's Torah portion, prelude.

**Moses, the First Redeemer**

**In** the year 2238 to creation, Jacob and his sons left the Land of Israel to reside in Egypt.

Initially, everything was fine. However, since Egypt was a land

of impurity, filth, and abomination, and its inhabitants behaved in a beastly and crude manner, the unclean atmosphere influenced those who lived there,

 *Wellsprings of Wisdom* 

**This** love for the Land of Israel must not remain an abstract idea.

**There** is an obligation on every Jew who is able without undue hardships, to establish their residence in the Land of Israel, even if they have to forgo wealth, honor, and other pleasures of this world that are available to them in abundance in other lands.

**Instead,** they should work hard and live modestly in the Land of Israel, for a small amount earned in sanctity and with the blessing of G-d in His holy land is preferable to thousands of gold coins in the impure lands abroad.

**It** is therefore most undesirable those that leave their families in Israel and go abroad for extended periods to earn a living.

**By** doing so, they cause themselves severe harm: they destroy their domestic peace with their wives, lose their connection with their children, and consequently, the children's education deteriorates.

**Many** such people have returned home after a long period abroad and found that they had no one to continue living with because their wives and children had already found other places to be, G-d forbid.

**Besides** all this, there is no blessing in the money that they earn in foreign lands.

**The** proper behavior is instead to live in the Land of Israel and work at whatever job G-d provides, even if the profit is less, and in this way, one can properly maintain their home and supervise the education of their children, which is of the greatest importance.

**Furthermore,** whatever they will earn, will then have great blessing.

**A** Jew who loves the Land of Israel with all their heart, and who establishes their residence in the Land of Israel, supports and upholds the holy Shechinah, causes G-d immense pleasure, and the reward that G-d will bestow upon them is beyond any measure!

**Parshat Matot-Masei - Moses's Power of Prayer**

and the descendants of Jacob, despite being most holy and pure themselves, deteriorated and fell into the realms of impurity.

As they became tainted, they fell under the dominion of impurity, and the head of the serpent, Pharaoh, took control over them, turning them into slaves.

The impurity grew stronger, enveloping, embracing, gripping, and not letting go.

The divine spark within the people of Israel dimmed, waned, and gradually began to sink deep, deep into the dark abysses, and in the 209<sup>th</sup> year of their descent into Egypt, Israel stood

at the brink of the most severe 50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity.

If they would have managed to drag them into the 50<sup>th</sup> gate, they would have had no hope for salvation.

In the distant land of Midian, Moses walked about surrounded by an aura of holiness and awe. Suddenly, G-d revealed Himself and declared: "Moses, we are now at the decisive stage of the battle against the powers of impurity, please, go out to war!"

Moses gathered his 'weapons' and went into battle.

You may wonder what Moses's 'weapons' were, so please continue reading.

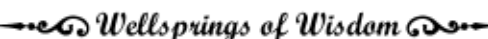
**Moses's Power of Prayer**

**In** the sacred Zohar, Moses is praised, saying: "Moses knew how to pray."<sup>6</sup>

We find in many ancient texts: the order of the secret intentions that one needs to focus on, through

which the worlds are bound together so that the prayers may ascend and be accepted willingly.

Sometimes one needs to arrange his prayer properly to unite the Divine names to



## Parshat Matot-Masei - Moses's Power of Prayer

sweeten the judgments, and to know to create a perfect unity in the reading of the Shema, to break through the locked windows of heaven and to open the closed gates of prayer so that none will prevent his prayer from ascending.

All this Moses knew very well.

Moses's weapon was prayer, and through prayer, he drew his vitality.

All of his battles and conquests were all through this power.

With his prayer, he fought the husk of Egypt and subdued it. With his prayer, he managed to annul the decree that was decreed following the sin of the Golden Calf, and the decree that was decreed following the sin of the spies.

With the power of his prayer, he managed to care for the

people of Israel - who walked in an empty and desolate desert - and fulfill all their needs.

For forty years, millions of people dwelt in the desert, and nothing was lacking them.

It was all by the power of Moses's prayer.

Moses was so strongly connected to the Al-mighty, that he was ready, without any preparation, and at any moment for prophecy.

As the verse says: "My servant Moses is not so, he is faithful in all my house" (Numbers 12:7).<sup>7</sup>

Moses's leadership began in the year 2447, and a few years later, in the year 2488, at the start of the 41<sup>st</sup> year, an event occurred that led to the end of his leadership.

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*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

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**7. Rashi** explains: "In all my house he is faithful" - He is a household member who enters without permission, and if needed, he speaks of his needs.

**However**, you (Aharon and Miriam), when I make Myself known to you in a dream, you will know, but if not, you have no permission to ask."



## **The Flaw of Striking the Rock**

**The** 40<sup>th</sup> year of their exodus from Egypt had just begun, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, the people of Israel learned about the passing of Miriam the prophetess.

The funeral ended, the people of Israel approached the basin to wash their hands and, to their utter dismay, no water came out. The well had disappeared.

As the verse states:

"And Miriam died there, and was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation" (Numbers 20:1-2).

The nation of Israel then panicked and began to quarrel with Moses, "And the people fought with Moses, and spoke, saying: Why have you brought the congregation of the L-rd into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die? And why have you brought us up out of Egypt" (Numbers 20:3-5).

Moses, seeing the great distress of the people of Israel, prayed to the L-rd:

"And Moses and Aaron went from the assembly into the entrance of the tent of meeting, and fell upon their faces" (Numbers 20:6).

G-d appeared to him and said: "Take the staff, and gather the assembly together, you, and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes" (Numbers 20:8).

G-d's will was that Moses speak to the rock that it give its waters.

However, in practice, Moses did not speak to the rock but struck it:

"And Moses lifted up his hand, and he struck the rock twice with his staff: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts as well" (Numbers 20:11).

This act of striking caused a great defect in the higher worlds, and as a result, Moses was decreed not to enter the Land of Israel.

From that day, 120 days passed, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Av,

**Parshat Matot-Masei - Please, L-rd, Open my Lips**

Israel approached the border of the Land of Israel.<sup>8</sup>

Moses decided it was an opportune time to pray for the annulment of the decree, and that

he might be granted entry into the land.

He began his prayer: "And I beseeched G-d at that time, to say" (Deuteronomy 3:23).

**Please, L-rd, Open my Lips**

**When** the great sage Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz 'Ba'al Hafla'ah', studied the verse "And I beseeched the L-rd at that time, to say" (- "Va'etchanan el-Hashem ba'et ha'hi lemor", Deuteronomy 3:23), he was puzzled:<sup>9</sup>

Every time the word 'to say' appears in the Torah, it implies 'to say to others'.

Here, however, this word has no apparent meaning, being that here Moses is beseeching G-d, and to whom and what exactly needed to be said to others?

He answered as follows:

The word 'saying' can be interpreted in the same manner

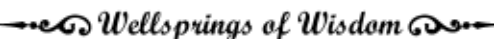
that our sages instituted (Berachot 4a) that one who prays must say at the beginning 'Please L-rd, open my lips'.

When Moses wanted to pray, he felt he was unable to open his mouth, and he therefore pleaded: 'to say' - 'please, L-rd, give me the strength to pray before You.'

Only after receiving strength, did he continue to pray: "L-rd, G-d, you have begun to show your servant..." (Deuteronomy 3:24).

The great sage, Rabbi Moshe Sofer, known as the 'Chatam Sofer', asked further:<sup>10</sup>

The reason why the sages instituted to say the verse 'Please



8. Pnei Yehoshua, Berachot 32b.

9. Recorded in his book 'Panim Yafot', Va'etchanan.

10. 'Eretz Yisrael B'mishnat Hachataam Sofer', page 2.

Parshat Matot-Masei - Please, L-rd, Open my Lips

L-rd, open my lips' before prayer, is that they knew that without G-d opening one's lips, he would not succeed to pray.

Due to the awe and dread of the King of kings, G-d, the ability for a mere mortal to speak is nearly taken away.

Therefore, in order to be able to pray, we precede with a plea before the prayer: Please, L-rd, open my lips.

However, seemingly for Moses, this reason is not applicable.

Moses was ready at every moment for face-to-face prophecy from G-d without any preparation, and was accustomed to pour out his heart to the L-rd

at all times, and he did not need any special preparation for this.

So why here, at the end of the forty years, when he was 119 years old, standing at the gateway to the Land of Israel, did he need to ask and plead: "Please L-rd, open my lips?"

He answered thus:

All the years of Moses outside of the land of Israel, indeed, he did not need preparation to pray. But now, he had reached the border of the Land of Israel.

Our sages extolled the virtues of the Land of Israel (Ketubot 75a): 'One of them (the sages in Israel) is like two of us (the sages in Babylon), and one of us that goes up to there is like two of them.'<sup>11</sup>

*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

**11.** Meaning: Abaye said (one of the sages of Babylon): One of them, of the sages of the Land of Israel, is equal in wisdom and sharpness to two of us, the sages of the Diaspora, because "the air of the Land of Israel makes one wise".

**Rava** (another sage of Babylon) added:

**One** of us, the sages of the Diaspora, who goes up to the Land of Israel, then

becomes equal in wisdom to two of the sages of the Land of Israel.

**The** Ritva explained this phenomenon:

**When** one goes up to the Land of Israel to study there, they leave behind the impurity of foreign lands and come under the wings of the Shechinah, and therefore receive additional divine assistance.

**Parshat Matot-Masei - Moses's Share in the Land**

Moses therefore felt a wonderful light and immense holiness, which he hadn't even felt in Heaven, because the ground of the Land of Israel is holier even than the heavens outside the Holy Land.

Therefore, standing at the gateway to the Land of Israel, he felt awe, fear, and tremendous holiness to the extent that his ability to speak was nearly taken from him.

Thus, this prayer, which was the first on the border of the

Land of Israel, needed to begin with the words: 'Please L-rd, open my lips.'

Moses then poured out his heart in fervent prayers, crying and pleading, in a storm and tempest: "Please G-d, let me enter the Holy Land."

He prayed 515 prayers, but ultimately, G-d did not accept his prayers, and he was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel.

It is here, at this point, that our Torah portion begins, the weekly portion - Parshat Matot-Masei.

**Moses's Share in the Land**

**This** Shabbat, G-d willing, we will read two portions, Matot and Masei.

In Parshat Matot, there are 112 verses, and in Parshat Masei, there are 132 verses. We will focus on Parshat Masei.

Parshat Masei is divided into three general sections:

The first part consists of forty-nine verses, summarizing the journeys of the Children of Israel in the desert.

The second part consists of seventy verses, dealing with the commandments pertaining to the Land of Israel.

The third part consists of thirteen verses and is the concluding portion of the Book of Numbers, discussing the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad.

The second part, which consists of seventy verses, contains in it five topics, each beginning with the words: 'And

Parshat Matot-Masei - Moses's Share in the Land

the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying.'

These five topics are:<sup>12</sup>

1. The conquest of the nations and the elimination of idolatry.

2. The demarcation of the land's borders and their sanctity.<sup>13</sup>

3. The allocation of the Holy Land to the tribes by their leaders.

4. Cities for the Levites to dwell in.

5. The designation of cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan river.

*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

**12.** This passage is based on Me'am Loez (Bamidbar, page 397), and 'HaParshiot' (Bamidbar, Vol. 2, page 433).

**13. One** of the founders of the 'Peace Now' movement in Israel came to the Lubavitcher Rebbe and spoke with him.

**The** following is a transcript:

"**I** would very much like to know if the Rebbe still holds the opinion that all the Israeli territories should be kept despite all the circumstances, including Judea, Samaria, and Gaza?"

**The** Rebbe: "Do you have influence in these matters?"

"**I** have influence like any Jew, and I will try to exercise it, but I want to know if the Rabbi holds this opinion?"

**The** Rebbe: "Then I can influence you, and my influence should be in the direction that all of the Land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel, and whoever gives away part of it to someone else, is robbing the people of Israel."

**"Even** if this includes war against the whole world?"

**The** Rebbe: "Those who want to fight Israel do not need a special reason, because they want to harm Israel, and it does not matter whether Israel acts this way or that way.

**I** come from Russia; in Russia, there were always blood libels, not because the Jews were guilty, but because the gentiles were looking for a pretext to harm Israel."

**"Can't** it be that the gentiles will ever want to make peace with us? Can't it be that the gentiles will want to make peace?"

**The** Rebbe: "Then it does not matter what you do and what I do. If they have power, it is not dependent on me or you to prevent them. It is dependent on G-d, and G-d does not need my encouragement, because every Jew, wherever they are, especially in the Land of Israel, is an only son of G-d.

**It** is not worth spending time looking for reasons to perhaps give something back from the Land of Israel..."

The great sage Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel, explained as follows (Numbers 35:1):

When Moses saw that he would not enter the Holy Land, he felt great sorrow, thinking to himself: I have labored and toiled so much for Israel, having brought them out of Egypt and guiding them for forty years in the desert to bring them to the Land of Israel, and yet now that I have come to the Jordan, which is the boundary of the Land of Israel, I have no merit to enter it and to bequeath it to my people.

G-d came and comforted him and consoled him, saying:

“Moses, are you saddened that you did not get to perform the commandments in practice ?

I will give you the opportunity

to command the people of Israel concerning the commandments related to the land, and it will be considered as if you entered.

For since you are the one who commands them - it is as if the commandments of the land were performed by you.”

Essentially, G-d said:

“Moses my servant - you are the one who determines the boundaries and purifies the land.

You are the one who allocates.

You are the one who gives cities to the Levites to dwell in.

You started and will complete to delineate the cities of refuge.

Everything is done by your word and your command, Moses my servant.

## **The Historical Journeys to Israel**

**In** our Torah portion, we are commanded about the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel, as it is stated:

"And you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell

therein, for I have given you the land to possess it" (Numbers 33:53).

The Ramban (Nachmanides) comments on this verse:

“This is a positive commandment of the Torah. He

Parshat Matot-Masei - The Historical Journeys to Israel

commanded them to dwell in the land and to inherit it, for it was given to them, and they should not reject the inheritance of G-d.

Our sages have emphasized (Ketubot 110b) the mitzvah of dwelling in the Land of Israel and the prohibition of leaving it, and they ruled the case of a woman who does not wish to ascend with her husband to the Land of Israel, and likewise vice versa, since we are commanded this mitzvah here, for this verse is a positive commandment.

The Ramban himself sacrificed and ascended to the Land of Israel to fulfill this mitzvah.

He testified about himself in a sermon he delivered in the synagogue in Acre, shortly after his arrival in the land:<sup>14</sup>

"The beauty of the world is the Land of Israel... It is the inheritance the L-rd specifically apportioned for His name. Those who merit to sit before the L-rd in

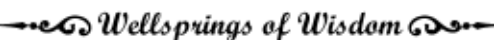
His land are like those who see the face of the king. Dwelling in the Land of Israel is equivalent to all the commandments, and this is what caused me to leave my land, and disturbed me from my place. I left my home, abandoned my inheritance... all because I desired to establish my soul in the bosom of its mother''.

He was not alone in this endeavor.

The following is a quote from 'Yesod HaMaalah' (Vol. 1, p. 178), by Rabbi Aharon Sorsky:

From the day Israel was exiled and banished from their land, in all periods of time, the Jews who ascended and tried to return and hold on to the land never ceased: 'Like the waves of the sea that never stop'.<sup>15</sup>

This continuous ascension, which began from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and which was renewed after the destruction of the Second Temple, during the period



14. Sermon of the Ramban for Rosh Hashanah (at its end).

15. Midrash Eicha Rabbah (Parsha 1, section 52).

of the Tannaim and Amoraim, took on different forms over time, and its dimensions grew and shrank according to circumstances - but the continuous chain never broke. In no generation did it ever completely cease.

Always, there were the rare individuals among the Jewish people, who risked their lives to ascend and live in the 'house of G-d'.

Sometimes many such Jews gathered together, hundreds and thousands, to ascend to the Holy Land together and settle there.

Especially notable are those first settlers who did so in the spirit of the Torah, who served as a living example for the Jewish masses to follow in their footsteps.

The great Aliyah of the Tosafists in the Middle Ages is one such example. More than three hundred scholars from England, France, and Provence, ascended to the Holy Land at the end of the fifth millennium (in the year 4971 to creation/1211 CE).

Similarly, is renown the ascent - fifty years later - of Rabbeinu Yechiel of Paris, with the students of his yeshiva (in the year 5019/1259), and the ascent of Rabbeinu Ramban, eight years later, an aliyah which staked a renewal of the Jewish settlement within the walls of Jerusalem.

Likewise, the ascent of Rabbeinu Ovadia of Bertinoro, the Mishnah commentator, who arrived from Italy to Jerusalem in the year 5248/1488, and lived there until the end of his days, about thirty years later, left an indelible impression on the Jewish presence in the Holy Land.

Two hundred and fifty years later, following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal, again in large numbers, great scholars and righteous men ascended to the Land of Israel, and enlightened all of Israel with their Torah.

These, of course, are great luminaries such as Rabbeinu Yosef Karo, the 'Beit Yosef' and his students, and likewise the Ariza"l and his students, most of whom settled in the holy city of Safed.



To them, we must add the Holy Shelah, Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, who ascended here about a hundred years later (in the year 5382/1622), and illuminated the land with his glory.

Eighty years after the Shelah (in the year 5461/1701), there was yet again a significant aliyah: Rabbi Yehudah Hachassid, founded the famous synagogue, known today as the Hurva Synagogue, and a large group of his followers, along with their families—approximately 1,700 souls in total rose up to Israel.

However, as often occurred, various calamities arose and befell them, and they were unable to establish firm roots in the Holy Land.

Forty-one years later, at the beginning of 5502/1741, Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar, the holy Ohr HaChaim, ascended to the Land of Israel.

He came with his elite students, with great self-sacrifice, from the distant community of Sali Morocco, and after various preparations and some delays, finally settled in Jerusalem.

In the preface to his commentary on the Torah, he writes:

“G-d enlightened my mind to rise and ascend to the place that I had considered, the place of the Divine Presence, the lofty city, the beloved city of the Creator of the world and the governance of the upper and lower worlds.

I girded myself with strength, and I risked myself through great dangers; and through a desert did I traverse.'

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, he established the great yeshiva 'Midrash Knesset Israel.'

The Chida recounted ('Shem HaGedolim, letter Chet, 42):

'I, the young one, was fortunate to be in his exalted yeshiva, and my eyes saw the greatness of his Torah, uprooting great mountains, and his sanctity was wondrous and marvelous.'

However, his time was short-lived, and before he had spent a full year in the Holy City, his day came, and in the month of Tammuz 5503/1743, he ascended to Heaven at the age of 47 years.

## Parshat Matot-Masei - Maintaining Holiness in the Holy Land

In that same year, the Ramchal, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, ascended to the Land of Israel, where he lived for about three years, before passing away at the age of 39 years (his resting place is in Tiberias next to the holy Tanna Rabbi Akiva).

About half a century later, the Vilna Gaon, yearned to ascend to the Land of Israel, and had already set out on his journey.

He wrote to his family in a letter from his travels:

'I, thankful to G-d, am traveling to the Holy Land, the desire of all Israel and of G-d, which all look forward to seeing, and all the upper and lower beings long for her'.

However, he was hinted in the midst of the journey to return from on High, and the entire matter remains shrouded in mystery to this day.

The students of the Vilna Gaon, led by Rabbi Menachem Mendel and Rabbi Israel of Shklov, ascended to the Land about ten years after their teacher's passing, in the year 5568/1808, and renewed the Ashkenazi communities and the Perushim Kollels of Safed and Jerusalem.

Throughout these periods of time, groups of immigrants exiled from Spain continued to stream to the Land of Israel and established their communities in the four holy cities: Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias, as well as in other cities such as Jaffa, Gaza, and Acre.

The refined and lofty yearnings and spiritual passions led all those immigrants to leave the diaspora, and with great personal self-sacrifice, grace the Holy Land of Israel.

## Maintaining Holiness in the Holy Land

**G-d** revealed Himself to Moses and told him that soon the people of

Israel would be privileged to enter the Land of Israel.

**Parshat Matot-Masei - Maintaining Holiness in the Holy Land**

“Before they enter, I ask you, go and teach them 'operating instructions'.

These 'operating instructions' were written over the span of an entire chapter of 30 verses.

When we look at this chapter (Leviticus chapter 18), we see that it deals entirely with distancing from abominations and maintaining holiness.

The chapter begins:

"As were the deeds of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not follow: and as were the deeds of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, you shall not follow: and you shall not walk in their ordinances" (verse 3).

For if you do as they did -

"The land spits you out also, when you defile it, as it spewed out the nations that were before you" (verse 28).

The Midrash explains (Sifra, Acharei Mot, 8:12, letter 8): 'As were the deeds of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not follow,' - could it mean that they

should not build buildings or plant plantings like the Egyptians ?

Rather it is stated: 'and you shall not walk in their ordinances,' - meaning the verse speaks of their ordinances and the customs that are theirs, their forefathers, and their forefathers' fathers.

What did they do ? A man would marry a man, and a woman would marry a woman, a man would marry a woman and her daughter, and a woman would marry two men. Therefore, it is stated: 'and you shall not walk in their ordinances.'

One however, who transgresses and behaves according to the ordinances and customs of the land of Egypt and the dwellers of the land of Canaan, rebels severely against the Creator of the World.

As Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel once said in a speech:

The Holy Torah warns us not to follow the abominations of the gentiles who are promiscuous and engage in forbidden relations - defiling their eyes and thoughts, contaminating their covenant and their holiness.

## Parshat Matot-Masei - Maintaining Holiness in the Holy Land

It is by virtue of maintaining our holiness, we will merit to prolong our days in our Holy Land.

However, if, G-d forbid, we fail to maintain our holiness, then the land will spew us out.

There are generally two levels of 'spewing out':

A. The land expels the sinner outside of the land. Therefore, he

is called 'a descender' because he has descended from his holiness.

B. He continues to live in the land, but in his heart enters a hatred for the land, for his people, and for all the surrounding reality.<sup>16</sup>

Conversely, one who merits maintaining his holiness merits and lives in the Land of Israel with inner fulfillment.

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*Wellsprings of Wisdom*

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**16. While** on this topic we'll share the following story:

**Many** years ago (before the establishment of the state of Israel), a gathering of rabbis was organized, and all the great rabbis of the time were invited.

**An** invitation was also sent to the great Rebbe of Sochatchov (who lived in Sochatchov, Poland).

**He** however, for personal reasons, was unable to travel, and sent his son in his place.

**When** the son returned, his father, the great Rabbi of Sochatchov, asked him: "My son, what did you see in the Land of Israel?"

**The** son detailed what he saw, and among other things he said: "Father, I was greatly surprised; the Jews who live abroad dream and yearn to go up to the Land of Israel, while in the Land of

Israel, I met Jews who do not feel at all that they are in the Holy Land."

**The** great Rebbe of Sochatchov replied to him:

**"Those** who do not behave as pious Jews " are vomited out... as it vomited out the nation' (Leviticus 18:28).

**We** must understand, when Moses said this to the people of Israel, the nations of Canaan were still in the land. Where do we find that the land 'vomited out the nation'?"

**"Rather,** we must say that even if one's body is there physically, they are not truly in the Holy Land of Israel."

**The** son then asked his father:

**"If** so, who is truly in the Holy land?"

**He** replied: "One who rejoices in the fact that he has merited to be in the Land

**Parshat Matot-Masei - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

May our merciful Father in Heaven grant us that the greatness, the holiness, and

the beauty and glory of the Land of Israel be revealed to us.

**Summary and Practical Conclusions**

**1.** One of the commandments that is equivalent to the entire Torah is the positive commandment to settle the Land

of Israel. This commandment is a positive commandment.

The Holy Land is very dear in G-d's eyes, and therefore His

— *Wellsprings of Wisdom*  —

of Israel - he is truly there." ('Hatzaddik Hamatmid M'Yerushalayim', page 125)

**We** will add another story on this topic:

**In** the Month of Tishrei, 5715 (1955), the Rebbe the 'Shefa Chaim' of Sanz prepared to leave the exile of America and travel to the holy land.

**His** close students already sensed during the High Holy Days his emotional state and extraordinary changes in his conduct, which they interpreted as part of his spiritual preparation before the journey to the Land of Israel.

**Those** knowledgeable on these matters mentioned in this connection the story of the great Rabbi Aharon of Zhitomir, of blessed memory, the author of 'Toldot Aharon' (a disciple of the great Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, of blessed memory).

**He** was visited by Rabbi Avraham Dov of Avritsh, of blessed memory (author of 'Bat Ayin'), on the eve of his journey to the Land of Israel who found him ill.

**Rabbi** Aharon said to him: 'I know that there is a cure for my illness, and that is, to drink from the waters of the Land of Israel. Now, since you yearn to travel there and your mind is already there, you are already like one of the natives of the Land of Israel. Therefore, I ask you, fill your mouth with water and then I will drink these waters and be cured, for the waters that have been in the mouth of one who yearns for the Land of Israel, must have healing properties and I will be healed by drinking them'...

**Rabbi** Avraham Dov did as Rabbi Aharon requested, and Rabbi Aharon was healed.

**Likewise**, our leader, the 'Shefa Chaim' - the Chassidim said to one another - since he was preparing to travel to our holy land, and all his thoughts were directed there, he is already like one who dwells there with all his 248 limbs and 365 sinews.

('Lapid Ha'esh', Vol. 2, page 474, by Rabbi Aharon Sorsky)

providence over it is constant, and due to His great love for us, He granted it to us as a gift.

**2.** The holiness of the Land of Israel is exceedingly great and awesome.

The entire reality of the Land of Israel is completely different, and we have no grasp of its holiness !

Suffice it that our sages declare that the soil of the Land of Israel is holier even than the Heavens in the diaspora.

**3.** While the commandment to settle the Land of Israel is high and lofty, is equivalent to the entire Torah, and its reward is immense and exalted, nonetheless it is very easy to fulfill.

However, to fulfill this commandment completely, besides the basic condition of living in the Land of Israel, there are five important conditions.

**4.** These are that one must be careful these five aspects:

**Action:** to live in the Land of Israel.

**Speech:** to speak only good about the Land of Israel, and to praise and glorify it.

**Thought:** to think positively about it.

The will of the heart: the feeling of joy and happiness in fulfilling the Creator's will and living in the Land of Israel.

**Intention:** one must intend in their dwelling in the Land of Israel that they are fulfilling a Torah commandment.

**5.** When a person lives in the Land of Israel and intends in doing so to fulfill the commandment of dwelling in the Land of Israel, which is a place of holiness, and that it protects him from sin; even if he sometimes sins, the merit of dwelling in the Land of Israel generally causes him to repent for it.

Thus, in the merit of dwelling in the Land of Israel, a person lives all his days in repentance.

One who merits to maintain his holiness merits to live in the Land of Israel with inner fulfillment.

**Shabbat Shalom!**

”A person must rejoice when the time for  
**prayer**

**as the author of the Tanya says that:**

every Jew, wherever he is, receives from G-d at the time of prayer a gift called **"Mochin D'Gadlut,"** meaning that the understanding of everything is expansive before him, as is written  
**"Open wide your mouth and I will fill it"** ”



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| City        | Candle Lighting | Shabbat Ends | Rabbeinu Tam |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| New York    | 7:52 pm         | 8:54 pm      | 9:20 pm      |
| Miami       | 7:48 pm         | 8:42 pm      | 9:17 pm      |
| Los Angeles | 7:35 pm         | 8:33 pm      | 9:04 pm      |
| Montreal    | 8:02 pm         | 9:10 pm      | 9:31 pm      |
| Toronto     | 8:20 pm         | 9:26 pm      | 9:49 pm      |
| London      | 8:28 pm         | 9:45 pm      | 9:56 pm      |
| Jerusalem   | 7:19 pm         | 8:08 pm      | 9:01 pm      |
| Tel Aviv    | 7:17 pm         | 8:06 pm      | 8:58 pm      |
| Haifa       | 7:17 pm         | 8:06 pm      | 8:58 pm      |
| Be'er Sheva | 7:15 pm         | 8:04 pm      | 8:56 pm      |

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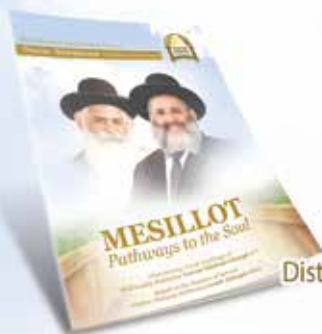
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