



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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OHR

Parashat Masei

HAMELECH

Man's Journeys Through Life

Question:

This week's *parashah* recounts the various sojourns that the Jewish people made in the desert. It must be understood: Why are these sojourns recalled; they appear to be mere history, without any specific lesson to teach us.

First Explanation: They Teach that One is Rewarded for Any Benefit that He Accrues His Fellow

On the opening *pasuk* in our *parashah*, the *Midrash Rabbah* [23:4] comments that these journeys merited being mentioned in the Torah because of the hospitality exhibited by the desert in hosting the Jews. The Midrash states that the desert will be rewarded in the future, as the *pasuk* states [Yeshaya 35:1], "The wilderness and the desolate land will be happy over them; the desert will rejoice and blossom like a lily." The Midrash continues to state that if the desert will receive such a reward for hosting the Jewish people, how much more so will an individual be rewarded for hosting Torah scholars in his home. In other words, it is the Torah's intention to teach us about how Hashem acts with creation. A desert is in the category of *domeim*, lacking knowledge, understanding, and a will of its own. But even so, since the Jews benefited by camping in its areas, all of those areas will be transformed into settled areas in the future. This is similar to the Torah's commandment not to abominate an

Egyptian because we sojourned in their land. Despite the fact that they tortured and oppressed the Jewish Nation, we are nevertheless, required to display our gratitude over the fact that we lived in their land. From this, an individual should learn proper conduct, by contemplating how much more so a man will be rewarded for an act of kindness that he performs for his fellow. This is so, even if he unintentionally caused his friend to benefit; how much more so if he does so intentionally.

The Desert was Transformed Into an Object of Holiness

I once heard a story that was told by R' Yaakov Galinsky zt"l. It was during the Holocaust, and he was traveling together with R' Reuven Bengis, the future Rav of Yerushalayim. Despite the fact that they found themselves in middle of a desert, as Shabbos was approaching, they could travel no further. They therefore stopped traveling. Together, R' Galinsky and R' Bengis recited *Kabbalat Shabbat*. When they reached the verse, "*Kol Hashem yachil midbar yachil Hashem midbar kadesh*, The voice of Hashem makes the desert tremble, Hashem makes the wilderness of Kadesh tremble," they screamed it in a loud voice. R' Bengis said, "You should know that this desert was created in the six days of creation. Since then it has longed to be holy [*yachil* can also allude to 'longing,' and *kadesh* to 'holy'], sanctified by the *Kabbalat Shabbat* that would be recited inside it. For this is why it was created, and it will be



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rewarded for this." Years later, when they had already arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* and R' Bengis had become the Rav of Yerushalayim, R' Galinsky went to visit him. R' Bengis was already quite old, and R' Galinsky asked him if he recognized him. After several attempts at trying to remember but to no avail, R' Galinsky began to sing the *pasuk* "*Kol Hashem yachil midbar yachil Hashem midabr kadesh.*" Suddenly, R' Bengis remembered that *Kabbalat Shabbat* recited in the desert during the Holocaust, and tears started to flow from his eyes.

The Second Explanation: To Atone for the Generation of the Desert

An additional explanation for the detailed recount of the Jews sojourns is offered by Maran the Chida, in his *sefer Pnei David*. The Chida writes that the reason the Torah lists the different encampments of the Jews in the desert is to atone for that generation. By reading about it year after year, it benefits the souls of the Generation of the Desert by atoning for their sins again and again. This teaching was based on what was written by R' Eliezer Nachman Puah zt"l: He wrote that our Sages have stated that if you repeat a teaching which you heard from the mouth of a scholar his lips move in the grave. So too, when you speak derogatorily about someone posthumously. Their souls are distressed by it, and it atones for them. This is what has been stated by our Sages that there are three kings who do not have a share in the Coming World. By repeating this statement and statements similar to it, it atones for the kings. This is why our Sages state, "And the

names of the wicked will rot." In other words, we should not mention them. For if their names are mentioned, even for bad, they will receive atonement, and they are not deserving of it. From here you can learn that if mentioning the Generation of the Desert's dishonor posthumously, despite the fact that they do not witness it nor feel it, atones for them, how much more so, a living human being. Each time a negative deed he committed is mentioned or he is disgraced, he should know that Heaven is atoning for his sins in this fashion.

The Third Explanation: To Fulfill Man's Purpose in Life

The Dubno Maggid, kabbalists, and the Alter of Kelm explain that when it comes to physical pleasures, the goal is reached only when the actual pleasure is experienced. This can be illustrated by the following analogy: If someone is traveling to a certain destination, when does he achieve his aim? Only when he has actually arrived there. However, if he does not ultimately reach his destination, even if he has travelled for a long time – his journey is worthless. This is not the case with spirituality, however. With spirituality, each and every preparation and exertion in the service of Hashem is a goal in and of itself – even if he does not achieve his goal. This is why the Torah listed the journeys of the Jewish people; it teaches us that even though their destination was ultimately *Eretz Yisrael*, it does not mean that the journeys along the way were meaningless. Rather, these journeys constitute a portion of the Torah, and each and



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every one is a means in and of itself. It is not simply and ends to a means.

Remembering the *Churban*

With this, we should contemplate the *Bein Hamitzarim*. We should think about how all of the journeys of the Jewish Nation are guided by Divine Providence, and that they have been caused by our sins. As such, we have a requirement to return to Hashem in repentance. In his *sefer Na'ot Desheh*, R' David Shneur *shlita* writes that each nation celebrates victory. But who ever heard or saw a nation that staged celebrations or designed symbols to commemorate a day of defeat, or a day of terrible suffering? All the more so, it would be unheard of for a nation to celebrate the day it went into exile. On the contrary, a nation makes every effort to blot out the memories of their defeats, and they even try to erase it from the history books. Indeed, we sometimes find one nation entirely erasing a monumental defeat from its history books, and at the very same time, the nation which defeated it, is staging a massive celebration of their own to celebrate their victory. However, this is not so with the Jewish Nation. For 2000 years an entire nation, scattered and dispersed throughout all the nations of the world and their lands, wallow in the dirt on the ninth of Av. We establish it as a remembrance of their defeat, the burning of our glorious *Beit Hamikdash*, and subsequent exit into exile. Not only that, but the commemorations and symbols – the various *halachot* which are practiced during this time – begin three weeks earlier on *Shivah*

Asar be'Tammuz. We remember the five tragic events which occurred on that day, and over these next three weeks of *Bein Hamitzarim*, we reduce our level of rejoicing and we avoid entering into law suits with gentiles. We refrain from eating and drinking in the manner we had previously, and each day we recite *tikkun chatzot* and *kinot* over the terrible *churban* and harsh decrees. Which nation memorializes their defeat in such a manner? Only the Jewish Nation. The Jewish Nation faithfully celebrate *chagim* in memory of the exodus from Egypt – “*Zman Cheiruteinu be’ahava*, the Time of Our Freedom with love,” “*Zman Matan Torateinu be’ahava*, the Time of Our Receiving the Torah with love,” “*Zman Simchateinu be’ahava*, the Time of Our Rejoicing with love.” **They also faithfully celebrate the “Time of Our Exile with love.”** The explanation for this is rather simple: The nations of the world view their victories and defeats as a demonstration of their power and might. Therefore according to this principle, they memorialize only the events which demonstrate their might, and they erase all memory of the opposite. But if such an event happens to the Jewish people, they see the Hand of Hashem and the Divine Providence which accompanies each occurrence. If we live with the feeling that *Eretz Yisrael* is the Holy Land, the “land that the Eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are upon it from the start of the year until the end of the year,” then it is no surprise that this feeling accompanies the Jews with each event, whether it be victory and success or defeat and downfall. With each event, the Nation demonstrates its faith in the Creator of



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the World, in Whose Hands are placed the fate of all mankind.

Story About the Emperor

There was once a powerful emperor who went out to tour his kingdom. The day happened to be Tisha B'Av. How astonished he was to see his Jewish citizens wallowing in the dirt, sitting, crying, and reciting *Kinot* by the entrance of the *Beit Haknesset*. He requested an explanation. One of his officers revealed to him that the Jews were crying over their *Beit Hamikdash* that had fallen to an enemy and was razed. "When did this occur?" inquired the emperor. "Close to 2000 years ago," was the response. When the amazed emperor heard this, he announced, "A nation that has remained faithful to its past for 2000 years and continues to cry over its destruction, will certainly merit salvation and see it rebuilt anew." This is what a gentile emperor understood, and it is the absolute truth. The faith of the Jewish Nation had been undeterred throughout many generations of exile, and it will certainly merit witnessing the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* and the return to the Land of its birthright. Through the power of the Master of the World, it will merit to once again renew the spiritual life that characterizes it.

Words of Mussar

We have learned that we must contemplate the Torah's intention in mentioning the journeys of the Jewish Nation in the desert. It is so that we understand the journeys of the Jewish Nation

throughout our history. The journeys following the destruction of the *Batei Mikdash*, the expulsion from Spain, the decrees of *Tach Tat*, and the Holocaust. Every occurrence that has befallen the Jews is an additional journey. So too, each individual, with every journey he takes, whether it be a move from one city to another, or from one place of residence to another. Each move is a major undertaking and it involves making new friends and neighbors, and adjusting to a new *Beit Haknesset* and a new congregation, as well as finding a new place to shop, etc. He is not always able to investigate all of the various aspects of the new neighborhood before he moves, to verify if they are appropriate for him. We must know that every personal journey is under the exact providence of Hashem. Only Hashem leads man and knows every man's purpose and goal in this world. Hashem is the One Who guides the footsteps of each man in order for him to fulfill his function and role. Hashem knows that this individual must become accustomed to his new surroundings, because there will be a benefit for his soul. When this will be engrained in man's heart and he will acknowledge it, he will understand how to utilize this journey for the best. He will recognize his task to perform kindness with his new surroundings, as we are taught, that the world was founded on kindness. Through his kindness, he will fulfill his role in the world.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka