

THE Chabad WEEKLY

Vol. 4, # 38

Chabad of North Beverly Hills, 409 Foothill Rd. Beverly Hills, 90210

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"These are the journeys of the children of Israel, going out of the land of Mitzrayim (Egypt)." So opens the Torah section of Massei ["Journeys" - Numbers 33-36], which goes on to chronicle their travels from Egypt to the Holy Land, listing their forty-two encampments from Ramases in Egypt to the Plains of Moab on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. It would seem, however, that there was only one journey which took the Jewish nation out of Egypt: their journey from Ramases to Sukkot. The other forty journeys were between points outside of the geographical borders of Egypt.

Why, then, does the Torah speak of the journeys, in the plural, of "the children of Israel going out of the land of Mitzrayim"?

Daily Exodus: Mitzrayim, the Hebrew word for "Egypt," means "borders" and "narrows." On the spiritual level, the journey from Egypt is a journey from the boundaries that limit us - an exodus from the narrow straits of habit, convention and ego to the "good broad land" of infinite potential implicit in the divine essence of the human soul.

And the journey from Mitzrayim is a perpetual one: what is expansive and uninhibited by yesterday's standards, is narrow and confining in light of the added wisdom and new possibilities of today's station. Thus, each of life's journeys is an exodus from the land of Mitzrayim": having transcended yesterday's limitations, a person must again journey from the Mitzrayim that his present norm represents relative to his newly-uncovered potential.

In the words of our sages, "in every generation, and every day, a person is obligated to see himself as having today exited Egypt." The endeavor to exit Mitzrayim takes on a special significance in the stretch of calendar known as Bein HaMetzarim ["between the narrows"] - the three weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av.

Bein HaMetzarim is our annual re-experience of the tragedy of galut - our banishment from the "good broad land" and the diminution of G-d's manifest presence on physical earth with the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem.

It is no accident that the Torah section of Massei is read and studied in this time of narrowing horizons and constraint of the spirit, imparting its eternal message that wherever one may stand in the forty-two-rung ladder from utter slavery to divine expanse, there is always the need, and capacity, to achieve an exodus from all that constrains us, from without and from within. (From: Week in Review, Vol 6, #48. Based on an address by the Rebbe, Shabbat Mattot-Massei 5715 (July 16, 1955))

And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes (mattot)... Numbers 30:2

The stick, it can be said, is one who has paid the price of leaving home. Indeed, one would hardly recognize it as the tender green shoot who departed the mother-tree: its supple spine stiffened into a column of inflexibility, its porous skin woodened into a core-deep hardness. The springy bough has become, well, a stick.

The stick, it can also be said, is one who has reaped the rewards of leaving home. The tender shoot gained backbone and stature. It has learned to stand its ground --- no longer is it swayed by every passing wind and breeze. Its spell out in the cold has toughened it, made it a force to be reckoned with. The maulable sprig has solidified into the formidable staff.

The Torah has two names for the tribes of Israel: shevatim and mattot. A shevet is a "branch" or "switch"; matteh means "stick" and "staff." Both names express that the tribes of Israel are limbs of the "tree of life," offshoots of the supreme source of all life and being. But each represents a different state in the Jew's relationship to his roots.

The shevet bespeaks a state of manifest connection to one's source: the branch is still fastened to the tree, or at least still has its life-juices coursing through its veins. The shevet is the Jew in a state of visible connection to his G-d, sustained by an open divine involvement in his life. The matteh is a shevet who has been uprooted from its tree. The matteh is the Jew in galut, a "child banished from his father's table" [1] to wander the cold and alien trails of exile. Deprived of its supernal moorings, the matteh is compelled to develop its own resistance to the storms of life; to look to its own frail heart for the strength to hold its own, far from the ancestral forest.

Every stick yearns to return to its tree, yearns for the day that it will once again be a fresh, vital branch, united with its siblings and nourished by its progenitor. When that day comes, it will bring with it its hard-earned solidity, the matteh-maturity it gained sticking it out in the lone and rootless environment of galut. (From: Week in Review, Vol 6, #48. Based on the Rebbe's talks at gatherings held on Shabbat Mattot-Massei in the years 5729, 5733 and 5735 (1969, 1973 and 1975))

LAWS OF THE HOLY TEMPLE

Adapted from Rambam's Mishnah Torah

THE SANHEDRIN, THE SUPREME COURT: The Supreme Court of seventy-one Sages (the Sanhedrin) had its chambers in the Temple. Here they would judge the people, and teach them to go higher and higher in Torah and mitzvot. The room in which the Sanhedrin would meet was called the Chamber of Hewed Stone. It was called by this name because the chairs for the judges were carved out of solid stone.

The wisest and most righteous judges in Israel used to meet there, right by the Temple, so that when they were deciding the most difficult problems of the Jewish nation they would always think of G-d, and explain His Torah correctly. When Moshiach comes, and the Temple will be rebuilt, the great Sanhedrin will once again meet in the Chamber of Hewed Stones in the Temple. At that time, peace will reign, and the city of Jerusalem will expand to include all of the Land of Israel!

TO HOLD THE TEMPLE IN AWE: We are commanded to hold the Temple in awe, and to revere it. Of course, it is not just the building that we revere, but the One who commanded us to build it.

How do we revere the Temple? We are not to enter the Temple Mount holding a staff, or with sandals on our feet, or dressed in informal clothes, or with dust on our feet, or money in our hands. Needless to say, we should not spit.

A person should not take a shortcut through the Temple Mount, entering on one side and going out the other, just to make the way shorter. Rather one should walk around the outside, and enter only for the sake of a mitzvah. When leaving the Temple, a person should not turn around and walk away. He should go backwards slowly, and then turn to his side until he is out of the courtyard. A person should not act frivolously or joke around opposite the eastern gate of the Temple, for it is directly opposite the Holy of Holies. Even though the Temple is now in ruins because of our sins, a person must hold it in awe and behave in a dignified manner at all times, just as when it was standing. (From: www.moshiach.net)

THE UNIQUE QUALITY OF MASHIACH IS THAT HE WILL BE HUMBLE. THOUGH HE WILL BE THE ULTIMATE IN GREATNESS, FOR HE WILL TEACH TORAH TO THE PATRIARCHS AND TO MOSHE RABEINU (ALAV HASHALOM), (1) STILL HE WILL BE THE ULTIMATE IN HUMILITY AND SELF-NULLIFICATION, FOR HE WILL ALSO TEACH SIMPLE FOLK.
FOOTNOTE: 1. LIT. "PEACE UPON HIM"; A TERM APPLIED TO THE DEPARTED. WHEN REFERRING TO MOSHE, KING DAVID, ETC., IT IS USUALLY WRITTEN AS AN HEBREW ACRONYM COMBINED WITH THE INITIALS OF THE NAME, E.G. M R A H MOSHE RABFINI AL AV HASHALOM (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM AV 1)

"Whoever comes to purify himself [of his sin] is given assistance." The expression "whoever comes" [indicates that he is granted assistance] as soon as he comes, and pardon and forgiveness are thus also granted forthwith.

- Tanya