

ON THE ROAD AGAIN (TO REPENTANCE)

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Avot 4:22-5:1

Orach Chaim 682:3-684:1

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 108

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Orlah 17

Parashat Matot and Parashat Mas'ai are usually read together, and are always read in the period between the Fast of the 17th of Tammuz and the Fast of the Ninth of Av. Because this is the period when our mourning over the exile is the most intense, many commentators have attempted to find allusions in these parashot to the circumstances and events of our millennia of suffering.

Parashat Mas'ai begins with a listing of the 42 places where our ancestors encamped in the desert. R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905; the "Gerrer Rebbe") writes that just as the Exodus itself was a lasting redemption [because even though we are again in exile, we still enjoy many of the benefits of the Exodus, such as the Torah and the feeling of being a free people], and we are therefore commanded to remember the Exodus on a daily basis, so every step of Bnei Yisrael's forty-year long journey in the desert holds a lesson for us.

He explains: After a person takes the initial step towards Teshuvah / repentance, whether from individual sins or from an entire way of life, he often finds that he is lost. He is wandering in a desert, and does not know where to turn. Let him not despair, for we are taught that the same pattern of events befell Bnei Yisrael. While their initial redemption occurred with great fanfare and obvious

miracles, the true climb to Eretz Yisrael required many stops. Eventually, however, Bnei Yisrael did succeed in reaching their goal, for Hashem was with them every step of the way.

The Ba'al Teshuvah / penitent who is struggling along his new path is required to keep this lesson in mind. As the haftarah for this parashah records, our ancestors were rebuked by the prophet because they did not do so. "They did not say, 'Where is Hashem, Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness?'" (Yirmiyahu 2:6). When the Jews in the generations before the destruction of the First Temple were struggling to maintain their level of Torah observance, they did not turn to Hashem for help. For this, as well as for their sins, they were punished. (Sefat Emet)

"Why do you dissuade the heart of Bnei Yisrael from crossing to the Land that Hashem has given them? This is what your fathers did, when I sent them from Kadesh-Barnea to see the Land . . . The wrath of Hashem burned on that day..." (32:7-8, 10)

R' Yonatan Eyebchutz z"l (1690-1764; rabbi in several German cities and a prolific writer in all areas of Torah) asks: Why does the verse refer to the "wrath of Hashem" against the Spies? Usually the Name "Hashem" refers to G-d's mercy, while the Name "Elokim" is used to refer to G-d's anger.

He answers: What was the sin of the Spies? They spoke truthfully when they said that the Land was very good and that its inhabitants were strong. However, their sin was that they said the Land was too good, that only a nation with a very strong nature could tolerate so much of a good thing, while Bnei Yisrael could not tolerate it. And, whereas Yehoshua and Kalev (the two "good" spies) argued that Hashem would help Bnei Yisrael tolerate the goodness of the Land, the other spies were unwilling to count on a miracle, feeling themselves to be unworthy.

It turns out that the Spies did not sin at all. They simply underestimated themselves, and thus refused to accept Hashem's gift. Hashem was angry at them for rejecting His goodness, but His wrath was tempered by love and mercy, for He recognized that it was His nation's humility and their love for Him that led them astray. (Tiferet Yehonatan)

"Then you shall be vindicated [literally, 'clean'] before Hashem and before Yisrael." (32:22)

Our Sages learned from this verse that a person must act in such a way that no one will suspect him, even wrongly, of wrongdoing. Thus, for example, the person who entered the Bet Hamikdash treasury to bring out coins to buy sacrifices would wear clothes that had no pockets and no hems so that he could not be accused of secreting a coin and stealing from the Temple.

R' Yishayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (1560-1630; the "Shelah Hakadosh"; rabbi in Prague and Yerushalayim) writes that there are two reasons for this mitzvah: First, the honor of Heaven is increased thereby. When one is suspected of wrongdoing, G-d's honor is diminished, for people say,

"So-and-so rebelled against G-d and did such-and-such." Others may even learn from what (they think) he did. To prevent this, a person must publicly announce that he has not sinned, as the tribes of Reuven and Gad did [when they were accused of building an unauthorized altar outside of the Mishkan]. We read (Yehoshua 22:22), "Almighty, G-d, Hashem; Almighty, G-d, Hashem: He knows and Yisrael shall know. If it is in rebellion or in treachery against Hashem, save us not this day."

The second reason that one must avoid suspicion is that Hashem wants us to love each other. One who hates another transgresses the negative commandment (Vayikra 19:17), "You shall not hate your brother in your heart." On the other hand, love is the mitzvah on which the whole Torah stands. Because one is halachically permitted to hate a sinner - indeed, it is a mitzvah to hate him, as it is written (Mishlei 8:13), "Fear of Hashem is hatred of evil," and it is written (Tehilim 139:21), "For indeed, those who hate You Hashem, I hate them" - therefore, one must distance himself from the suspicion of being a sinner. (Shnei Luchot Ha'berit: Sha'ar Ha'otiot)

"But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the Land before you, those of them whom you leave shall be pins in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they will harass you upon the Land in which you dwell. And it shall be that what I had meant to do to them, I shall do to you." (33:55-56)

R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (1696-1743; Morocco, Italy and Yerushalayim) observes: "They will harass you upon the Land in which you dwell." If we fail to expel the nations from Eretz Yisrael as G-d has commanded, then not only will they possess the part of Eretz Yisrael in which we do not live, they will also harass us in the part of Eretz Yisrael in which we do live. (Ohr Hachaim)

R' Pinchas Halevi Horowitz z"l (1730-1805; rabbi of Frankfurt-am-Main and author of important Talmud commentaries) asks: Why will G-d punish us for not conquering Eretz Yisrael by doing to us what He had meant to do to the prior inhabitants of the Land? Isn't it punishment enough for us that the nations with whom we share the Land will be pins in our eyes and thorns in our sides?

He explains: The Canaanite nations deserved to be exiled from Eretz Yisrael because of their sins, and it was our task to carry out Hashem's Will and to exile the Canaanites. Even if we failed to perform that task, however, G-d's Will must still be done; the Canaanites must still be punished for their sins, if not by human hands (ours), then by G-d's Hand.

It is the way of the world that once G-d releases destructive forces into the world, those forces do not necessarily distinguish between the righteous and the sinner. (This is why, for example, Hashem commanded that Bnei Yisrael remain indoors on the night of the Plague of the Firstborn and also protect themselves by performing the mitzvah of painting their doorposts with blood.) Thus, once Hashem releases destructive forces against our neighbors in Eretz Yisrael, those forces are likely to strike us as well. (Panim Yafot)

"Command Bnei Yisrael that they shall give to the Levi'im, from the heritage of their possession, cities for dwelling... The cities that you shall give to the Levi'im -- the six cities of refuge that you shall provide for a murderer to flee there, and in addition to them you shall give forty- two cities." (35:2, 6)

Why 42 cities? R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1783-1869; leading Galician rabbi) explains: Our parashah list 42 encampments where Bnei Yisrael camped in the desert. Each of these was a desolate place, but Hashem turned it into welcoming, habitable place. To show our gratitude, we must give Hashem's servants, the Levi'im, 42 places that they can call home. (Imrei Shefer)

R' Menachem Azaryah of Fano z"l

5307 (1547) - 4 Av 5380 (1620)

R' Menachem Azaryah is known as the "Rama Mi'Fano" after his initials and his hometown. He was also known as R' Emanuel. (He should not to be confused with "Rema"--R' Moshe Isserles.)

Rama was a leading scholar and philanthropist in Italy. His teachers included R' Yishmael Chananiah of Vallmontone and R' Ezra of Fano. Rama used his great wealth to support the poor as well as to publish sefarim (Torah works). Besides his own works, he was responsible for the publication of classic works including R' Yosef Karo's Kessef Mishneh and some works of R' Moshe Cordovero ("Remak").

Rama was accomplished in Talmud, halachah, and kabbalah. His best known works are in the last of these fields. Originally he was a disciple (from a distance) of Remak. However, when R' Yisrael Seruk, a disciple of Arizal, arrived in Italy in 5357 (1597), Rama became R' Yisrael's student. Rama is credited with playing a decisive role in making Arizal's system of kabbalah study the predominant one. And, because R' Yisrael Seruk was among the earliest students of Arizal, Rama's writings transmit teachings which are not found elsewhere.

Rama's work Asarah Ma'amarot addresses the moral and ideological lessons of kabbalah, rather than its technical side. It also explains many verses and Talmudic statements. In Ma'amar Chikur Ha'din (II:28), Rama observes that there is a difference between the term "nachalah" and "yerushah"- both of which mean "inheritance" and both of which appear in our parashah. The former word is related to "nachal" / stream, and is used repeatedly in this parashah when referring to inheritance which flows directly from a father to a son (just as a river flows continuously and directly). The latter term is used when referring to indirect inheritance, whether a son inheriting from a mother, a brother from a brother, or a daughter from a father.

The Torah says (Devarim 18:20), "Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue, so that you will live and possess (ve'yarashta') that Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you." Rama writes that the Torah uses a form of the word "yerushah" (the less direct inheritance) here in order to teach that we should not feel certain about holding-on to Eretz Yisrael. Similarly, the Torah is called a "morashah" (Devarim

33:4) because a son cannot inherit it from his father. Torah must be acquired by each person independently.

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