

LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
 Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** ע"ה
 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** ה"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
 Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** ע"ה
Ekman
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
 Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** ע"ה
Marenburg
 Passed away on the second day
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
 Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
 ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** ע"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
 Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
 ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.
AND IN HONOR OF
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח'ל
Shagalov
DEDICATED BY
 Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y. and Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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Tel.: (323) 934-7095 * Fax: (323) 934-7092

<http://www.torah4blind.org>

e-mail: sys@torah4blind.org

Rabbi Yosef Y. Shagalov,

Executive Director

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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

RELATING TO THE WEEKLY SECTIONS OF THE TORAH AND
SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Volume IX: *Bamidbar*

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In English rendition
by
Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

MATOS

“A TIME TO EMBRACE, AND A TIME TO REFRAIN FROM EMBRACING”¹

With regard to vows, the *Mishnah* states:² “Vows are a fence for restraint.” By taking vows, and thus refraining from using or doing things that would otherwise be permitted, a person trains himself in restraint. This is an important element of our Divine service, as reflected in our Sages’ charge:³ “Sanctify yourself in what is permitted to you.”

Conversely, the *Jerusalem Talmud* teaches:⁴ “Is it not sufficient what the Torah has forbidden to you?” This, however, serves as a directive for a person whose conduct reflects the verse:⁵ “G-d made man just.” When a person lives up to his human potential, he does not have to keep himself from involvement with permitted things. Indeed, he *must not* practice restraint,⁶ for he is obliged to elevate entities such as animals, plants, and inanimate matter which are on a lower level than himself.

But there are those who “have sought many forms of deception,”⁵ i.e., people who seek to concentrate their energies on worldly affairs. Instead of seeing themselves as a medium for G-dliness, they seek pleasure in material things. Not only do such people not elevate the material entities with

1. *Koheles* 3:5.

2. *Avos* 3:13.

3. *Yevamos* 20a.

4. *Nedarim* 9:1.

5. *Koheles* 7:29.

6. See the *Jerusalem Talmud*, the conclusion of tractate *Kiddushin*.

which they are involved, the desire and satisfaction they experience draw their souls downward (and also lowers the spiritual level of the objects used). Such persons need the restraint encouraged by vows.⁷

A similar rationale explains why our Sages ordained many safeguards to the observance of the Torah in the time of the Second *Beis HaMikdash*. In the era of the First *Beis HaMikdash*, G-dliness shone forth overtly. Even in the 70 years of exile following the first destruction, traces of this revelation remained.⁸

In the era of the Second *Beis HaMikdash*, by contrast, the light of holiness was lacking,⁹ thus strengthening the forces of evil.¹⁰ As a result, restraints and curbs were employed to help overcome the darkness.¹¹

And from generation to generation, as the darkness has continued to deepen, the Rabbis have added even more restraints and curbs.

This dynamic operates not only in the history of mankind as a whole, but within the personal life of every individual. There are times when G-dliness shines within a person's life. At those times, he need not fear involvement with worldly matters, for the world does not conceal G-dliness for him; on

7. See also *Likkutei Torah*, Matos 84b; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. I, pgs. 254, 565.

8. For example, during this exile there were still prophets. Baruch ben Neriah received the prophetic spirit from Yirmeyahu in Babylonia in the year 3350, 12 years after the destruction, as stated in *Sefer Yuchsin*. In the era of the Second *Beis HaMikdash*, by contrast, prophecy no longer existed, as *Rashi* (*Yoma* 21a, entry *Aron*) states. For the Holy Spirit did not rest on the prophets after the fourth year of the reign of Darius (the *maamar* entitled *Boneh Yerushalayim*, 5629). See also *Eitz Chayim*, *Shaar Mi'ut HaYareach*, ch. 2.

9. See *Yoma* 21b.

10. As our Sages state (*Megillah* 6b, cited by *Rashi*, *Bereishis* 25:23): "Tyre (a city opposed to holiness) became a metropolis because of the destruction of Jerusalem."

11. See *Likkutei Torah*, *Derushim LeRosh HaShanah* 57c.

the contrary, it serves to *reveal* G-dliness, as it is written:¹² “See who created these.”

But there are also times of darkness, when a person does not perceive G-dliness. At those times, he must employ self-restraint, avoiding involvement even with entities which are permitted. Otherwise, such involvement can drag him to a lower spiritual plane.

GAINING STRENGTH

The advantage of restraint in times of spiritual darkness is twofold:

a) Through restraint, one separates oneself from the darkness of the world. By avoiding the enemy, we do not allow it the opportunity to conflict with holiness.

b) Restraint draws down a higher G-dly light, and this empowers the forces of holiness.¹³

Similar concepts apply with regard to vows. The restraint which vows impose, forestalls (to a certain degree) the spiritual decline caused by excessive involvement in material matters. But vows also contribute positive influence, drawing down holiness.¹⁴ This empowers a person, and gives him the strength to confront the challenge of evil.

12. *Yeshayahu* 40:26; see the explanation of this verse in the series of *maamarim* entitled *Mayim Rabbim*, 5636, ch. 30.

13. The rationale is that these restraints and curbs stem from G-d's great love for us. To employ an analogy: A father is strict with his son because of his great love for him, protecting him in a comprehensive manner through restrictions and curbs (*Likkutei Torah*, *Matos* 85a).

14. For this reason, when a vow is made through comparison (e.g., “This is forbidden to me like such and such”), the object to which the comparison is made must be a sacrifice. It cannot be an article which is forbidden according to Torah law (*Nedarim* 14a).

Similarly, our Sages consider objects forbidden by vows as being sanctified (*Kesubos* 59b), to the extent that a hypothesis is advanced that the prohibition against *me'ilah* (making mundane use of consecrated property) applies with

LENDING STRENGTH TO OTHERS

The fact that the restraint stemming from vows is appropriate in a time of spiritual darkness implies that any person sanctioned to *annul* vows functions on an elevated spiritual level. Not only does he not need these curbs himself, he is able to strengthen people who would otherwise require a vow, allowing them to persevere in their worldly involvement without stumbling.

For this reason, we see that all those who are given the privilege of nullifying vows are on a higher spiritual level than are the people who take vows. For example, a father can nullify his daughter's vow because "anything that accrues to her belongs to her father."¹⁵ A husband can nullify his wife's vows because his wife is considered to be under his authority.¹⁶

Surely this applies to a wise man who is given the power to absolve the vows of others.¹⁷ In fact, one opinion¹⁸ holds that, in this context, the term "wise man" refers to a person ordained with the special *semichah* that began with Moshe our teacher. Such a person surely stands on a very high spiritual plane.

(Even three simple people are sanctioned to absolve a vow. This power is granted them, however, because they

regard to such objects. See *Likkutei Torah, Parshas Matos; Derech Mitzvosecha, Mitzvas Nedarim*.

15. *Kesubos* 40b.

16. See *Kiddushin* 30b.

17. For this reason, according to Rabbi Yehudah, when a court of three absolves a vow, one of them must be a wise man (*Bechoros* 37a). Even the Sages who allow three ordinary men to serve as a court agree that only a wise man can absolve a vow when acting alone.

Significantly, several authorities maintain that in a place where there is a wise man, a court of three ordinary men is not sanctioned to absolve a vow. See *Pischei Teshuvah, Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah* 238:1.

18. *Ramban, Nedarim*, ch. 3.

constitute a court of law, and are thus invested with authority beyond that of their individual selves.¹⁹⁾

SPIRITUAL PARALLELS

The concept of vows and their nullification, like all concepts in the Torah, applies within both the macrocosm and the microcosm. Generally, we conceive of the person taking a vow and the one revoking it as two different individuals. Within every personality, however, it is possible to conceive of different planes of Divine service: one rung on which a vow is required, and a higher level which enables the vow to be absolved.

Based on the teachings of *Kabbalah*, *Chassidus* explains²⁰ that these two planes refer to the powers of *Chochmah* and *Binah*. The approach of *Binah* necessitates vows and safeguards, while the approach of *Chochmah* allows for the nullification of vows.

The difference between these two approaches can be explained as follows: *Binah* refers to rational intellect, while *Chochmah* manifests itself in *bittul*.

Rational intellect is limited in scope, and can reach only so far. Beyond its given range, it is not an effective medium. For this reason, our Sages say:²¹ “You have no permission to question” with regard to matters that are above the reach of intellect. We cannot approach these levels with our reason, for there is the possibility of error. Our prophets warn²² against those who “are wise to do evil,” i.e., their wisdom is misdirected. Therefore, restraint — which limits the application of intellect — is necessary, and vows should be taken.

19. Rashbam, entry *Lomar*, *Bava Basra* 120b.

20. *Likkutei Torah*, Matos 84c, 85a.

21. Rashi, *Bamidbar* 19:2; cf. *Yoma* 67b; *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Chukas*, sec. 7.

22. *Yirmeyahu* 4:22.

When operating from *Chochmah*, by contrast, there is no suspicion that an error will occur. For *Chochmah* is characterized by *bittul*, selflessness.

This level of *bittul* is experienced in the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer,²³ when a person stands before G-d “like a servant before his Master,”²⁴ without any thought of himself. Indeed, a servant is considered no more than an extension of his master. For this reason, “Whatever is acquired by a servant is acquired by his master.”²⁵

Moreover, the *bittul* which characterizes *Chochmah* empowers one’s understanding, directing it in the proper path.²⁶ As mentioned previously, a wise man (*chocham*) has the power to absolve a vow, lending strength to a person who otherwise would require restraint. In a similar way, the *bittul* of *Chochmah* (described with the analogy of both a father and a husband) empowers the functioning of *Binah* (described with the analogies of a maiden and a wife).²⁷

WHO MAY TASTE THE FRUITS OF THE WORLD?

The need for restraint and vows arises not only because indulgence in permitted things may lead to transgression, but because the indulgence *itself* is undesirable. As a person

23. For the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayers reflect the level of *Atzilus* (as frequently explained with regard to the four levels of prayer, see *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5708, p. 80) and the light of *Chochmah* shines in the realm of *Atzilus*.

24. *Shabbos* 10a. See *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, the conclusion of sec. 95, which states that in prayer, one must stand “like a servant before his Master with awe, fear, and dread.”

25. *Pesachim* 88b.

26. To cite a parallel, our Sages say (*Avos* 3:9): “Whenever a person’s fear of sin comes before his wisdom, his wisdom will endure.” See also *Likkutei Torah*, the beginning of *Parshas Re’eh*; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. II, p. 428.

27. Within the category of *Chochmah* itself, there are several rungs, the higher the level, the more encompassing the absolution that stems from it. For this reason, when a father and a husband nullify a vow, their nullification is effective only with regard to the future. In contrast, when a wise man nullifies a vow, it is as if the vow was never taken.

becomes engrossed in worldly matters, he begins to consider the world important, and can forget that “there is nothing else aside from Him.”²⁸

The influence of *Chochmah* which allows for the absolution of vows sidesteps this difficulty. For the *bittul* of *Chochmah* not only lifts a person beyond the possibility of transgression, it endows him with a different perspective regarding the physical entities with which he is involved, enabling him to appreciate the G-dliness they contain.²⁹

To explain: As mentioned previously,³⁰ *Chochmah* and *Binah* are described by the analogy of a father and a mother. For *Binah* is considered the “mother,” i.e., a closer source of our emotional attributes.

The supernal emotional attributes are the source for the creation of the world. As such, the connection between our world and *Binah* is not distant, and *Binah* grants the entities in this world a certain measure of importance.

Chochmah, by contrast, is described as the father of the emotions — i.e., it is further removed from them, and from the world which comes into being through them. As such, the world is of no consequence to this level. On the contrary, *Chochmah* is permeated by the awareness that: “He alone exists; there is no other.”³¹

Since *Binah* grants the entities in this world a certain measure of importance, restraint becomes necessary. For involvement in worldly concerns might create a separation

28. *Devarim* 4:35.

29. To cite a parallel: consider eating for the sake of pleasure on *Shabbos* (a day on which *Chochmah* shines within the soul). Indulgence is not only permitted; it becomes a *mitzvah* and an expression of holiness.

We are permitted to absolve vows on *Shabbos*. This implies that the spiritual quality of *Shabbos* (and in microcosm, this is experienced every day during prayer) empowers the absolution of vows. See *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar* 84c.

30. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Balak* in this series.

31. *Tanya*, ch. 35, in the note.

between a person and G-dliness. This is not true with regard to *Chochmah*. Since the world is of no consequence for those who function at this level, it becomes possible for them to be involved with worldly concerns without fear of becoming separated from G-d.³²

COMFORT AND MERCY

In several years — as is the case this year — the *Shabbos* on which the passage concerning vows is read is the *Shabbos* on which the month of Av is blessed.³³

The above concepts provide us with a unique insight into the nature of the month. To explain: Av is the name by which the month is referred to in the *Targum*.³⁴ Nevertheless, it is Jewish custom — and “Jewish custom is considered as the

32. A comparison can be made to the contrast between Yosef and his brothers. The brothers were “a chariot [i.e., a medium of expression] for the world of *Beriah*.” Herein there is a connection to *Binah*, for “the supernal mother nests in the realm of the Throne [*Beriah*] (*Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 6).” Therefore, they were required to spend their lives detached from worldly matters. For this reason, they chose to work as shepherds.

Yosef, by contrast, was a chariot for the world of *Atzilus*, which relates to *Chochmah*, for “the supernal father nests in *Chochmah*” (*Sefer HaMaamarim* 5696, p. 119 and sources cited there). For this reason, the matters of this world were of no concern for him, and he was able to serve as the virtual ruler of the most powerful country in the world (*Derech Mitzvosecha* 81a; the *maamar* entitled *Mikneh Rav*, 5629; and the *maamar* entitled *Viloh Zachor Sar HaMashkim*, 5688; see also the *sichah* to *Parshas Vayigash* in this series).

In terms of our Divine service, this refers to the approach of *Yichudah Ila'ah*, sublime unity, which stems from *Chochmah*. At this level, worldly matters are of no concern.

This approach of *Chochmah* has an effect on *Binah* (absolving a vow that would otherwise be required). In terms of our Divine service, this implies that *Yichuda Tata'ah*, (the lower unity) is dependent on a taste of the *Yichudah Ila'ah*. See *Kuntres Eitz Chayim*, ch. 7ff.

33. See the *Sheloh*, *Cheilek Torah Shebichsav*, *Parshas Vayeishev*, which states: “Throughout the year, the festivals have a connection to the Torah portions read at that time.”

34. *Targum Yonason*, *Bamidbar* 13:25.

Torah itself”³⁵ — to bless the month with the name *Menachem* Av. (*Menachem* means “the comforter.”)

Moreover, this is not merely a custom; the phrase *Menachem* Av is acceptable as a means of dating legal documents and bills of divorce. Furthermore, even if one writes the word *Menachem* alone, the document is acceptable, for “it is well known that the month of Av is referred to as *Menachem*.”³⁶

The difference between these terms is obvious. The month of Av is connected with unfavorable events, and thus: “When Av enters, we minimize our joy.”³⁷ Therefore the word *menachem* is added as a prayer that G-d provide comfort for the negative influences associated with the month.

The name Av also has a positive connotation, meaning “father.” Indeed, it refers to a deeper dimension of consolation than does the word *menachem*. Thus our Sages comment:³⁸

It is the nature of a father to show mercy, as it written:³⁹ “As a father has mercy on his children.” And it is the nature of a mother to comfort, as it is written:⁴⁰ “As a man who will be comforted by his mother.” G-d promises: “I will be like both a father and a mother.”

From this, we see that comfort is connected with *Binah* (the mother), while the influence of *Chochmah* (the father) is even higher. Thus we see that there are three levels: the

35. See the *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Pesachim* 4:1; *Tosafos*, *Menachos* 20b, entry *nifsal* uses the expression: “the custom of our ancestors is....” See also *Minhagim Yeshanim Midura*, p. 153; *Maharil* as quoted by the *Ramah*, *Yoreh De’ah* 376:4.

36. *Pischei Teshuvah*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Even HaEzer* 126:12. *Knesses HaGedolah*, *Even HaEzer* 126:41.

37. *Taanis* 29a. See the *Korban Nesanel* to Rabbeinu Asher’s rulings on that passage. See also the *AriZal*’s interpretation of the word *avel*. (Note *Meorei Or* and other sources cited in *Yair Nasiv*.)

38. *Pesikta deRabbi Kahana*, commenting on the verse (*Yeshayahu* 51:12): “I, I am He who will comfort you.”

39. *Tehillim* 103:13.

40. *Yeshayahu* 66:13.

negative dimensions of Av, the comfort stemming from *Binah*, and the positive influence of *Chochmah*.

WHERE TEARS HAVE NO PLACE

The difference between comfort and mercy can be explained as follows: Comfort involves the recognition of a loss. Indeed, even after a person has been comforted, he still feels the loss.⁴¹ He may understand that there is reason for him to feel consoled, and yet the sensation of loss remains; he has merely learned to accept the negative factors with joy.⁴²

For this reason, one should no longer offer comfort to mourners after the period of mourning passes.⁴³ Since the time of immediate pain has ended, one should not remind people of it, and thus reawaken negative emotions.

For similar reasons, after the resurrection, the concept of consolation will no longer apply, for then “G-d will wipe away tears from every face.”⁴⁴

41. This is also indicated by the fact that *nechamah*, the Hebrew word for “comfort,” also means to feel regret. As explained above (see the *sichah* to *Parshas Toldos* in this series), all the different interpretations of a word are interrelated. When a person is comforted, he still feels the loss and has feelings of regret.

Moreover, even after a person has been comforted, the loss and suffering he feels are not transformed into good (see note 46), and so he feels regret. The level of Av, by contrast, is not associated with regret. On the contrary, the potential exists for the positive factors hidden within the negative to be revealed, as will be explained (*Sichos Chof Av*, 5712).

42. In this vein, our Sages state (*Berachos* 60b): “Just as one is obligated to recite a blessing acknowledging positive occurrences, so too one is obligated to recite a blessing on negative occurrences, accepting them also with happiness.” Nevertheless, although they are accepted with happiness, they remain negative occurrences.

For this reason, the happiness with which they are accepted is not the same as the happiness which greets a positive occurrence. (This is indicated by the expression “just as”.) See *Tanya*, ch. 26.

43. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 385:2.

44. *Yeshayahu* 25:8.

It is not appropriate to say that then we will be consoled for all the suffering which occurred previously. For in the Era of the Redemption, the positive di-

Mercy, by contrast, *fills* the lack a person feels, wiping away pain entirely. For this reason, the resurrection will come about through the attribute of mercy, as we say in our prayers: “He resurrects the dead with great mercy.”⁴⁵ For the attribute of mercy does not allow for even the *concept* of death or descent.

This echoes the thoughts explained previously: that comfort stems from *Binah* (the supernal mother), and mercy from *Chochmah* (the supernal father). From the perspective of *Binah*, the world is a significant entity. Therefore even when a person appreciates the need to accept suffering with joy, the suffering remains suffering.

From the perspective of *Chochmah* (utter *bittul*), however, worldly existence is insignificant. Therefore worldly privations are not regarded as suffering.⁴⁶

mension of the suffering of exile will be revealed, and we will see how this suffering led to the Redemption. Therefore we will not need to be consoled. On the contrary, we will thank G-d for our earlier afflictions, as it is written (*Yeshayahu* 12:1): “I will thankfully acknowledge You, O G-d, for having chastised me.”

45. *Siddur Tehillat HaShem*, p. 51. See the explanation in *Likkutei Torah, Parshas Eikev*.

46. Since at this level the lack is not felt, it is possible to compensate for it entirely. To cite an example: The resurrection (which, as mentioned above, is associated with the attribute of mercy) has its source in G-d’s essence, a level at which life and death are equal. It is because of the influence of this level that the dead can live again (the *maamar* entitled *Ner Chanukah*, 5670).

A parallel exists within our Divine service. By accepting privation with happiness, in faith that nothing bad descends from above, one causes the hidden good within everything to be revealed (*Tanya, Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 11).

When privations are accepted with joy, because one does not feel them as privations at all (the approach of *Chochmah*), total compensation will be granted for any lack. But when the acceptance is motivated by *Binah*, the privations are felt, and therefore will not be transformed entirely.

(To cite an example: When the refinement of our emotional qualities stems from *Binah*, an undesirable emotional characteristic is not transformed, it is merely held in check. Since *Binah* is the immediate source for the emotions, and views emotions as a significant entity, it cannot bring about transforma-

To cite an example: Reb Zusya of Anapoli was poverty stricken, and suffered many types of privations. The Maggid of Mezeritch once sent a student to him to learn how to accept suffering with joy. When the student told Reb Zusya the purpose of his visit, Reb Zusya replied that he did not understand what the Maggid had in mind. "I have never *experienced* any suffering," Reb Zusya exclaimed.

The *bittul* of Reb Zusya was so great that he did not feel that he suffered even when confronted by strokes of fate which the Torah considers privation. (For if these were not considered privations, the Maggid of Mezeritch would have had no reason to send his student to Reb Zusya. Moreover, the Maggid surely knew Reb Zusya's spiritual level and how he would respond.)

This is what G-d meant by saying: "I will be like both a father and a mother." He will grant Jews not only the comfort of *Binah*, but also the mercy that stems from *Chochmah*.

NOT ONLY GOLD, BUT SILVER

A question arises: Since in the Era of the Redemption the quality of mercy will be revealed, and this will compensate for all deficiencies, what need will there be for the aspect of comfort, which is connected with a lack and the pain it causes? For what will we be consoled?

These questions can be resolved as follows: The intent behind creation is G-d's desire for a dwelling in our material realm. This implies that the entities of our material world, as they exist within their own framework of reference, will become a dwelling for Him.

Mercy does not consider the limitations of our world. Thus it could nullify this framework of existence. Since the Divine intent is that this framework continue to exist, com-

tion. *Chochmah*, by contrast, involves a more distant connection, and therefore has the potential to transform the emotions.)

fort remains necessary. For comfort recognizes the existence of our world, and operates within that framework.⁴⁷

This is the intent of G-d's promise: "I will be like a father and a mother;" He will reveal both the qualities of a father, i.e., the transcendence of *Chochmah*, and that of a mother, i.e., the comfort of *Binah*, which will not nullify the world, but will instead enable the revelation of *Chochmah* to be internalized.

ABOVE THE WORLD, WITHIN THE WORLD

On this basis, we can also appreciate the meaning of *Menachem Av* — first *menachem*, the comforter, and then *Av*, the father. Our Divine service follows a pattern of ascendancy. Therefore the first stage is comfort, associated with *Binah*. For the month as it exists within its natural pattern has negative connotations. As mentioned previously, we are instructed: "When *Av* enters, we minimize our joy."

Through their Divine service, however, Jews have the potential to draw down comfort during this month, just as they have the potential to draw down holiness by taking a vow.

Afterwards, a higher level is reached, the level of *Av*, associated with *Chochmah*. This enables one to absolve vows. Moreover, since the influence of *Binah* is already present, the influence of *Chochmah* does not lead to the nullification of the world.

The month is thus a fusion of *Chochmah* and *Binah*. This enables the light which transcends the spiritual cosmos to be drawn down and internalized within our world.

(Adapted from *Sichos Shabbos Parshas Matos-Masei*, 5722)

47. Although there is no concept of offering comfort for death, there is a concept of offering comfort for the fact that one is an element of the lower realms, as reflected in the verse (*Yeshayahu* 2:21): "And he will go into the clefts of the rocks... for the fear of G-d." See *Tanya*, ch. 36.

MASEI

THE SOUL'S ODYSSEY

The Baal Shem Tov teaches¹ that the 42 journeys recounted in this week's Torah reading are reflected in the lives of every Jew. Birth is equivalent to the exodus from Egypt, and from that point a person makes 42 journeys, until he reaches *Eretz Yisrael*, the sublime Land of Life.

This teaching provokes a question: Several of the journeys featured events that ran contrary to G-d's will. Would Divine Providence structure our lives to follow a pattern that sometimes opposes G-d's will?!

From the Baal Shem Tov's teaching, however, we can infer that the journeys in and of themselves are all phases in holiness. Mankind was given free choice, and it is thus possible to act against G-d's will. The intent, however, is that "You should choose life."² (Indeed, this command empowers us to *make* the proper choice.) And when this choice is made, all the journeys become stages of ascent.

For example, at the encampment of *Kivros HaTaavah* (the graves of [those possessed by] craving), the Jews buried those who were punished as a result of their lust for meat.³ This encampment had the potential to bring the Jews to an elevated spiritual state, one in which they could "bury craving." But the Jews did not rise to the challenge, and so the

1. Cited by *Degel Machaneh Ephraim*, *Parshas Masei*.
 2. *Devarim* 30:19.
 3. See *Bamidbar* 11:15.

forces of evil were able to bring about the outcome described in the Torah.

Every person knows which of the 42 encampments in his life have been used positively, and which have not. With regard to the future, each of us can see to it that every journey leads to a positive goal. This is particularly true if a person “chooses life,” thus connecting himself to “the tree of life,” the teachings of *P’nimiyus HaTorah*. For *P’nimiyus HaTorah* reveals the good present within every entity, and transforms the negative qualities into positive ones.

AS THE PENDULUM SWINGS

Similar concepts apply with regard to *beyn hameitzarim*, the three weeks of mourning between the fall of Jerusalem on the Seventeenth of Tammuz and the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* on the Ninth of Av. (*Parshas Masei* is always read during these three weeks.⁴) The process which brought about these events was intended to bring the Jews to a spiritual peak.⁵ But we did not make the proper choices, and the forces of evil were able to transform this potential into a negative pattern.

Consider the Sin of the Golden Calf, which is the source of all the sins which followed it. Our Sages explain⁶ that this sin came about because, at the Giving of the Torah, the Jews had been granted a vision of “the ox-faced creature” — one of the four archangels leading the Heavenly Chariot.⁷

From this, we can see that the event which led to the most severe sin had a source in holiness, and a potentially holy purpose. And when one desires to “choose life,” not only will

4. See the *Sheloh*, *Cheilek Torah Shebichsav*, *Parshas Vayeishev* which states: “Throughout the year, the festivals have a connection to the Torah portions read at that time.”

5. This is evident from the drastic nature of the descent which came about.

6. *Shmos Rabbah* 42:5.

7. See *Yechezkel* 1:10.

one not sin, one will be able to tap this positive source. This may lead to a vision of the Heavenly Chariot even more profound than that granted the prophet Yechezkel.⁸

To cite another parallel: Yeravam ben Navat is cited⁹ as the paradigm of one who “himself sinned and caused others to sin.” Nevertheless, he was not a simple man. On the contrary, our Sages explain¹⁰ that he was able to offer 103 interpretations to the teachings of *Toras Kohanim*.

Similarly, when describing Yeravam’s meeting with Achiyah of Shiloh, the *Tanach* states:¹¹ “And he was wearing a new cloak, and the two were alone in the field.” Our Sages interpret¹² this to mean that Yeravam had achieved new Torah insights which only the two of them could comprehend.

Nevertheless, because of the influence of the forces of evil, Yeravam sank to unique depths, building golden calves for the people to worship. (Herein, there was also a direct connection to his former height, for עגל, Hebrew for calf, is numerically equivalent to 103.) If, however, Yeravam had decided to “choose life,” he could have used his potential to reach even more elevated peaks.

Similarly, with regard to *beyn hameitzarim* and the events associated with it, were it not for the influence of the forces of evil, this episode would have led to heights of holiness. Moreover, even after the influence of evil has been felt, purposeful sins can be transformed into merits through *teshuvah*.¹³ And through *teshuvah* we will immediately be redeemed,¹⁴ meriting the complete and ultimate Redemption.

8. *Yalkut Shimoni*, Parshas Yisro, sec. 286.

9. *Avos* 5:18.

10. *Sanhedrin* 103b.

11. *I Melachim* 11:29.

12. *Sanhedrin* 102a.

13. *Yoma* 86a.

14. *Rambam*, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:5; cf. *Yoma* 86b.

At that time, these days will be transformed into days of joy and celebration.¹⁵ From *beyn hameitzarim* (lit. “between the straits”), we will be granted *nachalah bli meitzarim*, “an inheritance without any boundaries,”¹⁶ which will be revealed in the near future by *Mashiach*.

(Adapted from *Sichos Shabbos Parshas Matos-Masei*, 5719)



15. *Zechariah* 8:19; *Rambam*, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchos Taanios* 5:19.

16. Cf. *Shabbos* 118a.

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

32

The connection between Ahavas Yisroel and the future Redemption can be emphasized yet again, not only because the negation of exile comes through the negation of the cause of exile (which comes through the opposite of Ahavas Yisroel¹). For in our situation, after the completion of our actions and Divine service throughout the time of exile, and after the completion of all forty two journey in the "wilderness of the nations," [when] we find ourselves already "by the Jordan near Jericho"³ (the stage of Moshiach who "smells and judges"⁴), on the threshold of Redemption, certainly the reason for exile has already been corrected. Therefore, the emphasis on Ahavas Yisroel anticipates the beginning of the true and complete Redemption, which is connected with the point of unity above any division. This emphasis on the unity of the Jewish people is a result of the aspect of *yeichida* (the fifth level [of the soul])⁵ that is in all Jews equally. For this is a spark of the soul of Moshiach,⁶ the general *yeichida*.⁷

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Matos-Masai,
2 Menachem Av, 5751)

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1. See Yoma 9b.
 2. See *Likkutei Torah* of our Parsha 88:c and further.
 3. Our Parsha 33:48.
 4. *Sanhedrin* 93b. See *Likkutei Torah* of our Parsha 89b.
 5. [Literally, "like a taste." Translator's note.]

[There are five levels to the soul. The fifth and highest level, "*yeichida*," which means unity or singularity, is the "actual part of G-d Above" within every Jew. Translator's note.]

6. *Remaz* to the *Zohar*, vol. 2 40b. And to the *Zohar*, vol. 3 260b. And elsewhere.

7. It is known that the verse "A star shall go forth from Yaakov" refers to king Moshiach. It also refers to each and every Jew who is compared to a star, since in each and every Jew is a spark of the soul of Moshiach. (See *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 2, p. 599. See there for further references.)

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