



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Matot-Masei / פרשת מטות-מסעי

### Traveling Home

The name of this week's second parsha – Masei – is derived from the Jewish people's travels in the desert. Finally, at the end of the Sefer Bamidbar the Jews are close to the border of the Land of Israel and the Torah recounts all of the forty-two stations of their journey. What is the purpose of this list of places?

The Ba'al Shem Tov offers a beautiful idea.<sup>1</sup> From one perspective, many of these stations were seemingly not part of God's ideal plan and only became the temporary home of the Jewish people due to the sin of the spies and the extension of their stay in the desert. Theoretically, one might think of these journeys and encampments as wasted time, a tragic occurrence that is better to be forgotten.

Therefore, to counter this idea, the Torah lists all of these places one by one. The naming of the encampments underscores that even as the above description is correct, there is still inherent importance to all of the Jewish people's travels. Wherever the Jewish people, or even an individual Jew, finds themselves, they are there due to direct divine providence and are charged with a mission in that very location.

This idea has been a comfort and a challenge throughout the long exile. Far from the Land of Israel, Jews found solace in the fact that they were in exile for a purpose. They were in exile for a divine purpose – to purify and elevate their diaspora home and strove to do so. As the Tzemach Tzedek charged his chassidim: “Make **here** into the Land of Israel.”<sup>2</sup>

However, this is not the end of the parsha. After listing all of the waystations, the Torah delineates the borders of the Land of Israel. Reading this section in light of the Ba'al Shem Tov's

<sup>1</sup> Extrapolated from Ba'al Shem Tov al HaTorah.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Torat Menachem 5715:1, 78



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idea creates a more unified and balanced picture of our national destiny. Yes, diaspora communities are important. Yes, there is value to purifying the world at large. However, we must never forget that our ultimate and true home is the Land of Israel. It is to there that the path leads, albeit in a long and circuitous fashion.

Perhaps this is part of the meaning of Yerushalayim being referred to as “the resting place and the inheritance.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout our history we are in constant motion, traveling from place to place. This journey can be worthwhile, but only if we don’t lose sight of the ultimate goal. It is Yerushalayim to which we return at the end of the exilic journey. This city is our true inheritance.

May we use this time period of the nine-days to instill within ourselves this sense of Yerushalayim as our true home and resting place.

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<sup>3</sup> Devarim 12:9.