



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Matot-Masei / פרשת מטות-מסעי

## Centered on the City

In this week's parsha the members of Reuven and Gad request to Moshe that they should stay and settle the land on the eastern side of the Jordan river. After some consternation and negotiation, Moshe acquiesces to their request, on condition that they go with their brethren to battle. Despite this deal, the midrash does not mince words in its assessment of the members of this tribe. They are described as loving their money more than the Land of Israel and were punished for their choice with being exiled first.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is interesting that when Moshe describes the final deal he adds that half of the tribe of Menashe should live together with the people of Reuven and Gad. This is surprising since they were not part of the original group that requested to live there. Ramban, trying to parse their sudden appearance, suggests that when Moshe saw that the land was too vast for just the people of Gad and Reuven he opened it up for other tribes and part of Menashe expressed a desire to live on the eastern side of the Jordan due to their large flocks.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe,<sup>2</sup> however, argued that the people of Menashe were placed on the eastern side of the Jordan for a fundamentally different reason than Reuven and Gad. The people of Menashe were inherently and incredibly connected to the Land of Israel as evident by the daughters of Tzelafchad who were members of this tribe, arguing with Moshe to retain their portion in the Land. Rather, Moshe knew that in the future the lands on the eastern side of the Jordan would be part of the expanded Land of Israel and Moshe wanted to lay down the roots for that in the present. Therefore, he placed specifically a tribe that was intimately bound with the Land just beyond its borders to allow them to be a bridge to at least partially extend the sanctity of the Land to the eastern side of the Jordan.

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<sup>1</sup> Bamidbar Rabbah 22:7.

<sup>2</sup> Likkutei Sichot 28, parshat Matot-Masei



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Thus, according to the Rebbe, there can be two different Jews who live side by side in the diaspora. One is reprimanded by God for over-loving his money and under-loving the Land. The other is connected to the Land even in the diaspora and serves to bridge his local community to the sanctity of the Land.

These models are important for Jews in the diaspora vis-à-vis their relationship with the center of the center – Yerushalayim. A Jew who lives in the diaspora due to the lack of connection to Yerushalayim and sees the three weeks and nine days as a nuisance in the midst of a summer vacation is failing the test of exile. Rather, even those who live in the diaspora must still remain existentially connected to the Yerushalayim. This period of the year should be one that is intense and stark. By living a life connected to Yerushalayim one can bring a little bit of the city's sanctity, solemnness and joy to communities around the world, thereby bringing redemption one step closer.