

The Journeying Staff

Rabbi Isaiah HaLevi Horowitz, known as the *Shelah* ([-Link](#)) teaches (*Chelek Torah S'bksav, Parshat Vayeshev, 197a*) that the holidays, regardless if they are biblical or post-biblical, are related to the Torah-portion that we read that week, according to the annual cycle of the reading of the *Five Books of Moses*. So too, it is concerning the connection between portions of *Matos* and *Maasei*, --which are always read in the time of year called, "*Between the Straits*"-- and the *Between the Straits*, the *Three Weeks* in which the Babylonians placed a siege on Jerusalem, and then set the Holy Temple in flames. There are numerous connections between these two Torah-portions and the concept of *Exile*¹, however, the connection is not only about the concept of *Exile* that began with the *Three Weeks*, but even deeper yet, these portions are connected with giving us the strength to do the *Service to G-d* that we must in order to *Leave Exile*! More so, when *Divine Providence* sets up that we read both portions of *Matos* and *Maasei* as one², there is definitely a *specific* lesson and strength given for the *Service* of the *Between the Straits*³.

The reason behind the Torah-portions, read on *Shabbat*, are a source of strength and guidance for the *Service* of the *Between the Straits*, is based on the law that all the laws of mourning of the days of *Between the Straits* do not affect *Shabbat*, for (-Jerusalem Talmud, Brochois 2:7), "*There is no mourning on it (the Shabbat)*," and even more so, (-Tur and Shulchan Oruch Alter Rebbe, Simon 242), "*It is a Mitzvah to Pleasure it (the Shabbat)*." Meaning that *Shabbat* is a realm in which the entire concept of *Between the Straits* does not "*touch*". Deeper yet, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, known as the *Tzemach Tzedek* ([-Link](#)), explains that the *Shabbatot* of the *Three Weeks* are of the category of (-see Megillah 13b), "(G-d) *Prefaces the medicine before the ailment*," and are prefacing of the medicine for the concepts of the *Between the Straits*. And especially that (-Isaiah 1:27), "*Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitent through righteousness*," which (-Likkutei Torah Devarim 1b), "*Here 'justice' refers to Torah(-study)*," hence, the Torah-portions read these *Shabbatot* are definitely "*prefacing the medicine*," to the '*ailment*' of exile, giving guidance and strength to transform these days of mourning into (-Zachariah 8:19), "*Shall be for the house of Judah for joy and happiness and for happy holidays*."

To understand how the portions of *Matos* and *Maasei* becoming one gives specific strength and guidance, we will need to first examine as to how these two portions can become one, when they seemingly have no connection one to another. *Matos* speaks of commandments and events that took place at the end of the forty years in the desert, while *Maasei* is a sort of "*sum total*" of *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, and *Numbers*, which is about the entire forty years in the desert?

The Explanation: The Baal Shem Tov ([-Link](#)) teaches (-See Shaarei Yichud V'Emunah, Chapter 1) that, "*The name with which it is called in the Holy Tongue*," is the life force of that which carries its name⁴, and hints upon its content. So too, it is concerning the names of the Torah-portions:

Matos: We find that all of Israel, as they are divided into *Tribes*, are called by two names; *Mateh* and *Shevet*, which are two words in the Torah used for *Tribe of Reuben, Shimon, Levi, etc.* This very two words, in their simple meaning refer to a branch of a tree. Only that, *Shevet* refers to the branch of a tree as it is either still connected to the tree, or still has the '*life*' moisture of the tree, and hence is still '*fresh and soft*'. *Mateh* (*stick; staff*) only refers to the branch after it is disconnected from the tree, dried up, and hence, '*strong and hard*'. Carrying this back over to Israel being called *Mateh* and being called *Shevet*, both names refer to source of the *Souls of Israel* as they are sourced within the *Divinity* of the *Supernal Tree*. Only that, *Shevet* refers to the soul as she is connected to the "*Supernal Tree*⁵," and their cleaving to G-d is not openly recognizable, while *Mateh* refers to Israel as they are not openly connected to the "*Supernal Tree*," and their cleaving to G-d is not openly recognizable. *Generally Speaking*, the term *Shevet* applies to the soul as she is in Heaven there *Above*, while the term *Mateh* refers to the soul as she has descended into the physical world here *Below*. So too, the Torah-portion called *Matos* reflects on the *Souls of Israel* as they descend to the *Below* and manifest in physicality to be as one separated from its source.

Maasei: *Travels* refers to completely and absolutely leaving and disconnecting from there where you are to a quantum leap elevation, getting closer to the *Land of Israel*.

In the realm of *Service to G-d*, the two are but of one journey. The *Maasei* ascent is only possible as the outcome of the soul's descent into the *Below*, where it stands strong as a *Mateh*, even as it is '*disconnected*' and is not openly recognizable, even to itself, as one cleaving to G-d. Meaning, when the soul is *Above* it is a stationary position of "*Standing*", incapable of any *quantum-leap ascents*. It grows *gradually* within its *own realm*. It is through the soul descending into the *Below*, entering the realm of being a *Mateh*, and here it studies Torah and observes mitzvot, the *Wisdom* and *Will* of G-d, it not becomes mobile, a *Traveler*, experiencing *quantum-leap ascents*, to heights incomparably higher than where it originally was in Heaven *Above*.

More Detailed: The above explained is how *Matos* and *Maasei* are both two parts of one journey, in which *Matos* is but the *Journey*, and *Maasei*, but the reward. However, more detailed, both parts of the *journey* lay within each of the portions. *Matos* represents both, the *journey of descent*, in overcoming the *concealments* and *state of*

separation, its reward is that it receives strength from the source of the soul, "*Eitan*" (lit. *Mighty*. Refers to the *Essence* of the Soul) of the soul, far more so than it did while *Above* in Heaven. *Maasei* is written in the plural, "*Journeys*," inclusive of both, the descent and *service*, and the quantum-leap ascent and *reward*.

The Answer: With this we can now return to understanding the connection between the portion of *Matos* and of *Maasei*, and the days of *Between the Straits*, and the connection of *Matos* and *Maasei* being connected as *one*, and the days of *Between the Straits*.

The *descent* of the soul represented in *Matos* (a stick separated and dried up from its tree and the tree's sap) is specifically into the physical world, when the world is in a state of exile. For in the times of the Holy Temple there was the (-Avot 5:5), "*Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Holy Temple*," the *Children of Israel* saw and heard *Divinity* openly, and hence, their service to G-d was one of *Love* and *Awe*, thus they were in a state of *Shevet*, and not of *Mateh*, in need of the additional strength of the *Eitan of the Soul*. It is specifically in the times of exile, "*Between the Straits*," that the soul is in a state of *Mateh* (separated) and needs to dig deeper into its qualities as a *Mateh* (strong), in order to transform the *Darkness* into *Light*, and hence, has the reward of *Mateh* (*Eitan of the Soul*)!

So too, the *truest* experience of the *Journeys* (plural, to the *Below of Below* and then to the *Above of Above*) can only take place when the word is in a state of exile, "*Between the Straits*".

Then there is when *Matos* and *Maasei* are connected, read as, and become *one*, in which each has an additional guidance and strength, in which each one effects the other, making the *Service* (descent) and the *Heights* (ascent) greater and easier to achieve:

Maasei gives *Matos* the strength in our knowing that the entire *descent* was as the *travels* in the desert (-Numbers 9:18 & 20:23), "*By the mouth (word) of G-d they traveled*." Which, this gives greater support and strength to our *Service* in the times of exile. And so too, that the *Service* of *Mateh* (strong) have the Torah-strength that it be in a fashion of *Maasei* (traveling away into a quantum-leap ascent), growing from heights after heights. Likewise, that the experience of the *Mateh* the *Eitan of the Soul* reveals itself to the soul *Below* in a fashion of *Maasei*, deeper and deeper into the *Eitan of the Soul*, until reaching the highest level of might of the source of the soul. In other words, being that the might of the soul in itself is *Finite*. However, through our *Service* of *Mateh*, staying strong in a time of separation, the soul is elevated into *Divinity* --which is *Infinite*, to the ultimate point of, "*Become one with the 'body' of the King* (G-d)," becoming one, per say, with the *Essence* of G-d!

So too, *Matos* gives *Maasei* the strength that the *Maasei* reward and true *mobility* be not separated in time from *Matos*, as a reward that comes only *after* the *Service* part of *Mateh*, but rather, the *Maasei* experience of the *quantum-leap mobility* is connected and one with the *Mateh Service*, here and now, in the time of exile itself!

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The year the Rebbe delivered this Talk was said, and so too the year that the Rebbe edited and give it out for publishing, Matos and Maasei were read and one, and the portion of Pinchas was read in the days of Between the Straits.

We had mentioned earlier that in a year that *Matos* and *Maasei* are read together, we then have *Four* Torah-portions read on the *Shabbatot* of the *Between the Straits*, being that the first of its *Shabbatot* we read the portion of *Pinchas*. In light of what we explained concerning the guidance and strength the *Matos* and *Maasei* being read, and becoming one, gives to the *Between the Straits*, we can now appreciate what this entails having the portion of *Pinchas* involved, as well --and on a year when the *Between the Straits* begins on a *Shabbat*, we have the *Fifth* Torah-portion of *Balak* involved, as well.

Seemingly, the question arises, how can we demand of a person to consistently maintain the *Matos Strength* throughout each and every of his *42 Journeys* of his lifetime, when each and every *Journey* is so different, from extreme to extreme?!

Granted that the first *journey*, out of Egypt, which was (-Numbers 33:3), "*With an exalted arm, before the eyes of all of Egypt*," and so too, the *Journey* that brought them to the foot of Mt. Sinai, it is easily understood how this situation demands of the human to as well use the strength needed to ascend in his *Service*. However, how can we demand of one to be able to use his *Mateh Strength*, when his is in a state of the *Journey* of *Rithma* (Rashi, ibid 33:18), "*Called so for the Evil Tongue of the 'Spies'* (against the *Land of Israel*, which took place there), or the *Journey* of *Aivel Shittim* (connected with the word *shtut*, "*folly*" referring to the teaching (-Sotah 3a), "*Man does not sin lest he is overcome by a spirit of folly*"), which is connected with the sin of idolatry of the idol *Peor*?!

And in order to answer this, we read the portion of *Pinchas* specifically in the *mourning exile* time of *Between the Straits*. *Pinchas* (-[Link](#)) stepped outside of himself and his being a finite being, and entered into the realm of the *Infinite Self-sacrifice* of (-ibid, 25:11), "*His zealously avenging My zealotry.*" In this *Infinite Realm of Self*, the different extremes within the *Journeys of Life*, make no difference in one's commitment and Service to G-d. Thus, we understand that the completion of the *Matos-Maasei* as one *Journey* --*Strength of Matos* be in the fashion of the *Maasei quantum-leap ascents*, and the *Maasei quantum-leap ascents* taking place during and one with the *Strength Mateh Service*-- is only when we introduce the *Service of Pinchas*, for only this *Infinite Self-sacrifice* can bring about the uniting *Matos* and *Maasei* as one experience.

And yet another question upon the *Matos-Maasei* as one *Reward* arises: (i) How can one reach and experience the ultimate, "*Becoming one with the 'body' of the King,*" while here *Below* in the *Mateh*, when we are taught that this ultimate reward to the *Infinite Self-sacrifice Service* of (-Deuteronomy 6:5), "*With all your might,*" is (-Likkutei Torah, Bechukotai 47b-c), "*In their death they see,*" after the refinement of one's *Animal Soul* through the *ZService* of *Subordination* and *Transformation*, but not in their lifetime?!

Here too, reading the Torah-portion of *Pinchas* during the *Between the Straits*, answers the question. The norm of not being able to experience the, "*Becoming one with the 'body' of the King,*" during one's lifetime *Service* only applies when one only serves G-d within the *Finite* definition of his logical being. However, when one steps out of his *Finite* limitations of his logical and emotional self, and go against his nature, he then ascends beyond the limitations of being a *creation*, even out of the limitations of his soul, as it stands in the *source of its source* ("*Eitan Strength of the Soul*"), and (-Ecclesiastics 12:7), "*And the spirit returns to G-d, Who gave it,*" and, "*Becoming one with the 'body' of the King.*" For this *Pinchas Service* completely refines the body and the *Animal Soul*, and therefore, he can achieve the true *Infinite Ascent Journey* that the soul achieves through its *Mateh Service* in the *here and now*.

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The year the Rebbe delivered this Talk was said, and so too the year that the Rebbe edited and give it out for publishing, the days of Between the Straits began on a Shabbat, in which the portion of Balak is read.

In the years that *Matos-Maasei* are read as one, there are those years that the *Between the Straits* begin on a Shabbat, meaning that its opening day of 17th of *Tammuz* (as well as its closing day of 9th of *Av*) coincide with a Shabbat. This brings along yet an additional specific concept to the realm of *Service* of *Matos-Maasei* becoming one.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, known as the *Alter Rebbe* (-[Link](#)), explains (Likkutei Torah, end of Korach) that, "*The Soul for itself does not need any correction at all,*" but rather, the soul descends into the *Below* solely for the purpose of rectifying the body, its *Animal Soul*, and, "*The portion of this world belonging to him.*" From this we understand that the true *Mateh Service* (and the true *Mateh-Maasei* reward) isn't the soul overcoming and imposing itself upon the body and *Animal Soul*, with the soul now free to do its service to G-d. Rather, the primary service is that the soul *subordinate* and transform the very body, *Animal Soul*, the *Darkness* of the world, and the *Darkness* of exile!

In other words, that the Soul remains *Mateh Strong* even in its *Mateh Separation* descent, and even the Soul's new found *Mateh-Maasei quantum-leap ascent* and *strength* through this work with the *Mateh* (separated) *Animal Soul*, is ultimately no novelty, being that the *Soul* is ultimately a *Piece of G-d*, and naturally has a *pleasure in Divinity*. Thus, not being a *novelty*, this cannot bring about the ultimate the true quantum-leap mobility into the *Essence of G-d*. However, when man's *Mateh Service* is not focused on the *Soul*, but on the transformation of the *Animal Soul* into goodness, which this is contrary to the nature of the *Animal Soul*, and how much more so, when the *Mateh Service* is focused upon the transformation of the *Darkness of exile* into life, this is a true novelty, and hence, one is truly rocketed even beyond the *Infinite*, "*With all your might,*" of the *Soul*, being that he now, "*Becoming one with the 'body' of the King,*" with, per say, the *Essence of G-d*!

This is what (i) *Between the Straits* starting with a *Shabbat*, and (ii) *Between the Straits* having also the portion of *Balak*, brings into the *Matos-Maasei* as one dimension of the *Redemption of the Between the Straits Service*.

Note: Jeremiah (1:11-12) was shown by G-d, in the prophesy of the destruction of the Holy Temple, "*a rod of an almond* (Hebrew: *shekaidim*) tree," emphasizing that, "*For I (G-d) hasten* (Hebrew: *shokad*) *My word to accomplish it.*" Upon which we are taught (Rashi, ibid), "*An almond tree takes twenty-one days from its blossoming until it is completely ripe, as the number of days between the seventeenth of Tammuz, when the city was broken into, until the ninth of Av, when the Temple was burnt.*" Mystically Speaking, G-d is not just showing the *destruction* with this *Almond Rod*," but also, and primarily so, the transformation of these 21 Days into goodness and light, the good *Almond Rod of Aaron*, the haste to transform these days of mourning into (-Zachariah 8:19), "*Shall be for the house of Judah for joy and happiness and for happy holidays.*"

- (i) *Shabbat*: The opening day of the *Between the Straits* is a *Fast-Day*. However, this *Fast* of 17th of *Tammuz* is postponed to Sunday, being that all the laws of mourning of the days of *Between the Straits* do not affect *Shabbat*, for (-Jerusalem Talmud, Brochois 2:7), "*There is no mourning on it (the Shabbat),*" and even more

so, (-Tur and Shulchan Oruch Alter Rebbe, Simon 242), "It is a *Mitzvah* to *Pleasure* it (the *Shabbat*). Hence, this very *Fast-day* (*Darkness* of *Exile*) is transformed into a day of *Delight* (*Light* of *Redemption*). More than this, we are taught (Torat Kohanim, on the verse Psalms 92:1, "A song with musical accompaniment for the Sabbath day") that the very concept of *Shabbat* is⁶, "To rid the world of the *Harmful Forces*," upon which Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, known as the *Tzemach Tzedek* (-[Link](#)), explains that the completion of *Shabbat* is the transformation the *Harmful Forces* into goodness!

(ii) *Balak*: The theme of this portion is that Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, and (-Deuteronomy 23:6), "But the L-rd, your G-d, did not want to listen to Balaam. So the L-rd, your G-d, transformed the curse into a blessing for you, because the -ord, your G-d, loves you." More so, it is in this very portion that Balaam gives prophesy of *Moshiach* and the era of, "The End of Days," in which the entire world will be transformed into the *Garden of G-d*!

Thus, when the *Between the Straits* (i) begin on a *Shabbat* (day of transformation of *Darkness* into *Light*) in which (ii) we read the portion of *Balak* (portion of transformation of *Darkness* into *Light*), and (iii) we read the portion of *Pinchas* (*Infinite Self-Sacrifice*), and *Matos-Maasei* as *one* (Ultimate Service and Reward of Strength in a fashion of *quantum-leap* journeys, and these *quantum-leap* ascent into the, "Becoming one with the 'body' of the King" happens in the *now and here*)) this hastens even more so, "These days will be transformed to joy and happiness," the transformation of the, "Rod of Almonds," into the (-Eicha Rabba, Pesichta 20), "I hasten to immediately bring my son into the Land of Israel"!

1. (i) *Matos* has Moses speaking to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Menashe, about the sin of the spies, which caused the exile of 40 years in the desert. (ii) *Maasei* begins with retelling of the 42 Journeys in the desert with the intent of (-Tabchumah, Maase 3), "he Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, "Recount to them all the places where they provoked Me," which is the reason for exile. Additionally, the portion goes on to speak of the *Cities of Absorption*, which is the place of exile for one who unintentionally kills another. (iii) The *Shelah* himself gives the mystical insight that *Matos* speaks of the laws of an *Oath*, which the sin of oaths causes a blemish in the *Soul*. *Maasei*'s laws of murder causes a blemish in the *Body*. And these two blemishes caused the destruction of the *First* and *Second Holy Temples*.
2. We purposely do not read them as two portions. Rather, in the fourth reading, we start, with the pre-reading blessings, in the first portion of *Matos*, and conclude in the second portion of *Maasei*, with the post-reading blessings, transforming the two portions into one.
3. Firstly, when these two portions are united, we then end up reading Four-Torah-portions: *Pinchas*, *Mattos*, *Maasei*, and *Devorim*. And in a year that we also have the *Three Weeks* start on a *Shabbat*, we have a *Fifth* portion, *Balak*, as well.
4. Being that all creations came into being through the utterances of G-d, "And G-d said, 'Let there be...,'" thus, the letters of the utterance with which G-d brought it into being is the very life force of the being. This carries over unto the name of a person, given to him by *Divine Influence*, and so too with the names of Torah-portions, which all became, "A custom of Israel."
5. See Zohar, Vol III 239b: "(Isaiah 64:3), 'No eye had ever seen a god besides You,' ...A supernal place... and it is called, 'World to Come,' and from it comes forth one tree... And this supernal and precious tree is above all other trees..."
6. And so it was the nature of *Shabbat* from its beginning. And on the very first *Shabbat* of the *Six Days of Creation*, sunlight served for 36 consecutive hours, transforming the night *Darkness* of Friday Night into *Light*.