

Torah Weekly

ד"ב

PARSHAT MATOT-MASSEI

24 Tammuz - 1 Av 5785
20 - 26 July 2025

Torah: Numbers 30:2-36:13
HafTorah: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 4:1-2; Isaiah 66:1; 66:23-24; 66:23

OH, MY GAD

The tribe of Gad has always had my utmost respect. Other tribes - such as Judah, Levi and Joseph - may be more famous, but the fortitude and sacrifice demonstrated by the tribe of Gad is unequaled.

In this week's Torah portion, we read that the tribe of Gad, accompanied by the tribe of Reuben, requested of Moses to settle outside the mainland of Israel, on the east bank of the Jordan River, whose holiness was not on par with the land on the west of the river. Their request also entailed a material sacrifice - their land wasn't as fertile, it wasn't "flowing with milk and honey." Though ostensibly their request was based on the east bank's abundant pastureland for their cattle, they had a loftier hidden agenda.

In the blessing he granted the tribe of Gad before his passing, Moses says, "*He saw the first portion for himself, because there the portion of the lawgiver is hidden*" - *Deuteronomy 33:21*. Rashi, quoting from the Talmud, explains: "[Gad] saw fit to take for himself territory in the land [on the east bank], whose land was the beginning of the conquest of the Land. For Gad knew that within his territory would be contained the field designated for the burial of 'the lawgiver,' namely Moses."

No other tribe exhibited such selfless devotion to Moses.

And another of Gad's unique qualities:

Moses acceded to Gad's request, but only after the tribe agreed to enter Israel's mainland and wage battle against the Canaanites. The tribe of Gad formed the elite frontline corps; they led their brethren into battle. Why Gad? Once again we turn to Moses' blessing to Gad: "He lives like a lion; he will tear off the arm [of his enemy, along] with the head."

Rashi explains that Gad's battle victims were readily identifiable. With one fell swoop of the sword they would cut off the head together with the arm. The ability to strike such a blow is an indication of tremendous lion-like strength, and it was due to their unique and tremendous strength that Gad marched at the forefront of the Israelite army.

The battle against the seven Canaanite nations was fought more than 3,000 years ago. But its spiritual counterpart is ongoing. That is the war being waged within the heart of every Jew against the unhealthy and unspiritual impulses that are his natural lot. The objective is to settle in the Promised Land: a

state of holiness and connectedness to our Creator.

This internal conflict comprises multiple battle arenas. We regularly struggle against noxious thoughts and ideas, negative desires and urges, as well as poor behavior patterns. Normative battle strategy calls for dealing with each arena on its terms. We conquer the mind through studying Torah and meditating on its ideas and precepts. The heart is won over by inculcating it with love and awe for G-d and our magnificent heritage. Behavior patterns are corrected through practice, and also as a natural result of our mind and heart's refinement and spiritualization.

This is a laborious process, requiring that we methodically sever the individual "limbs" and expressions of our spiritual foe.

Enter the tribe of Gad and their distinctive approach to battle.

Their physical brute strength was a reflection of their spiritual strength - revealed when they courageously volunteered to march in advance of the Israelite troops. There is nothing rational about an offer to endanger one's own life for the benefit of others. Such dedication emanates from a soul-dimension which transcends logic, emotions, and even the deep-seated self-preservation instinct. It is an expression of the soul's essential and utterly selfless commitment to G-d and fellow Jew.

When one succeeds in tapping into the core of the soul, there is no need to sever the enemy's limbs piecemeal. With one blow, the awesome strength of the Jewish soul lops off the "arm together with the head." The head represents the mind, our premier faculty, and the arm is a metaphor for action, the human's basest function—both defeated with one blow.

In modern terminology, this is called the "nuclear option." One that can be exercised with no concern for possible collateral damage...

*By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg
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ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

In this week's Torah portion the Torah tells us, "*You shall be guiltless towards G-d and towards Israel*" - *Numbers 32:22*. From this we learn that one should always have at least two people together as trustees when it comes to public funds. We also learn this from Moses; Moses was the trusted servant of G-d Himself, of whom the Torah relates that after his passing nobody ever equaled his level

of closeness to G-d, yet the Torah tells us that when an accounting was being made of the materials donated to the Sanctuary, it was done "by the hand of Itamar the son of Aaron." Moses was surely trusted by G-d, yet he had somebody else with him when doing the accounts. The Torah teaches us not to leave any grounds for suspicion on the part of the casual observer.

We see this also from Jewish law. The law is that when the priests were carrying around the money donated to the Temple, they were not allowed to wear either a cloak with a hem on it, or anything with space in which money could be hidden, in case of any suspicions, however false, which might be aroused. We are told to be free of blame and suspicion before our fellow and before G-d, as we quoted earlier, to "...be guiltless towards G-d and towards Israel."

Like many ideas discussed in the Torah, our first reaction may well be "that is very obvious." But how often do we find ourselves placing ourselves, or others, in a situation which is open to misinterpretation or to false suspicion? We see from the Torah that we must always be careful not to create any kind of situation where it even appears that we are doing the wrong thing. It is even more important to take care not to place others in such a situation, for everyone's benefit.

The question was once asked, "Which is more important - Torah precepts or ethical concepts?" It is a well-meaning but misguided question. Torah precepts include ethical and moral practices, whether in our business lives, personal lives, or daily relationships with others. Torah is as much about our relationship "between man and man" as "between man and G-d" and the ultimate fulfillment of Torah requires us our concentration on both. So, the answer to the question? The one is included in the other. Torah observance must include ethical and moral behavior. Indeed, large sections of Jewish Law deal with fair practice, civil law, slander and libel, contracts, promises, and so much more. The Torah is our guidebook not just in "spiritual" and "G-dly" matters but in mundane, everyday matters. It is in our day-to-day material lives that we are specifically able to elevate our surroundings through adherence to the ethics of Sinai.

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PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.

2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 20 Building a Temple

We are commanded to build a Sanctuary to serve [G-d]. In it we offer sacrifices, burn the eter-nal flame, offer our prayers, and congregate for the festivals each year.

This is one of the three Mitzvot the Jews were commanded to fulfill upon entering the Land - the other two being crowning a king and annihilating Amalek.

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MATOT IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Matot," means "Tribes," and it is found in Numbers 30:2. Moses conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Israel.

War is waged against Midian for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Israel, and the Torah gives a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the high priest.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Manasseh) ask for the lands

east of the Jordan as their portion in the Promised Land, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, but subsequently agrees on the condition that they first join, and lead, in Israel's conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

HISTORY OF FRENCH JEWRY

Jews have lived in France since the early Middle Ages, although there is evidence that Jewish settlement can be dated back to the Roman period. During the Carolingian Period, Jews were employed as merchants and were considered the direct property of the Crown. Following the First Crusade in 1096, the Jews of France were subject to a century of violence and blood libel accusations, culminating in their expulsion by King Philip Augustus in 1182; the Jews were only allowed to return 16 years later. Over the centuries, various repressive measures would be enacted against French Jewry, including arrests and property seizures, leading to another expulsion, this time by Phillip the Fair, in 1306. Nine years later, Jews were again allowed to return, only to be expelled again in 1394, although they continued to live in Provence. However, Jewish life only began reestablishing in the rest of France in the early 17th century.

Following the French Revolution, France became the first European nation to emancipate its Jews, a practice it followed as it exported its revolution across Europe, abolishing ghettos wherever its forces went. However, despite the Jews' newfound freedom, a debate raged in France regarding their integration into French society. Complaining that Jews were not integrating quickly enough, Napoléon Bonaparte convened an assembly of important leaders of the Jewish community

first to clarify their political and religious allegiances and loyalties in 1806, followed up a year later by the so-called Great Sanhedrin, leading to the establishment of the Consistoire Central Israélite de France (Central Consistory of French Jews) as the representative body of the Jewish community.

While French Jewry began integrating into the mainstream of society over the 18th and 19th centuries, antisemitism remained a persistent problem. In 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish artillery officer, was arrested and convicted of spying for Germany on trumped-up charges, leading to a massive, decade-long scandal. This period was marked by intense antisemitic sentiment as well as by a well-organized campaign for Dreyfus' release by figures such as the writer Emile Zola, who famously wrote "J'accuse!," an open letter in which he accused the government of antisemitism. France also has a long history of Jewish scholarship, led by, first and foremost, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, known as Rashi (4800-4865, or 1040-1105). Rashi headed a Yeshiva in Troyes, and wrote commentaries on the Torah, as well as nearly all of the Talmud. His grandsons, as well, were great Torah scholars, including Rabbi Yaakov ben Meir, known as Rabbeinu Tam (4860-4931, or 1100-1171), one of the leading Tosafists, who authored commentaries on the Talmud.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 24 Tammuz 5785 - 20 July 2025 **Jews of Jerusalem Burned Alive (1099)**

When the crusaders captured Jerusalem in 4859 (1099), during the First Crusade, the Jews of Jerusalem fled into a synagogue. The crusaders then set flame to the synagogue, burning alive all the Jewish men, women, and children who had taken refuge there. All Jews were barred from living in the city of Jerusalem for the following 88 years.

Tuesday, 26 Tammuz 5785 - 22 July 2025 **Frankists Vanquished (1759)**

The Frankist sect was created by Jacob Frank, who claimed to be the reincarnation of the false Messiah Shabbetai Zvi. In the early 5500's (mid-1700's), he sought to create a new religion that would incorporate both Judaism and Christianity, leading to the formation of the Frankist sect, centered in Poland.

In 5519 (1759), the bishop of Lvov arranged for a debate between the Frankists and three prominent Jewish leaders: Rabbi Israel of Mezhibuzh (the Baal Shem Tov), Rabbi Chaim Rappaport, and Rabbi Yitzchak Dovber Margulies. The four-day debate ended with a resounding victory for the rabbis, and the date was instituted as a day of rejoicing, celebrating the successful halt of the Frankists' evil influence.

Wednesday, 27 Tammuz 5785 - 23 July 2025 **Third Expulsion From France (1322)**

After having been allowed back into France in the year 5077 (1315) (after the expulsion in 5066, or

1306, by Philip IV), the Jews were once again expelled from France on 27 Tammuz 5082 (1322) by Charles IV, who thus broke the pledge made by his predecessors in 5077 (1315) that the Jews would be able to stay in France for at least 12 years.

Thursday, 28 Tammuz 5785 - 24 July 2025 **Passing of "Yismach Moshe" (1841)**

The 28th of Tammuz is the Yahrzeit of Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (5519-5601, or 1759-1841) of Uhely, Hungary, author of Yismach Moshe and patriarch of the Hungarian Chassidic dynasties.

Passing of Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1886)

Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (born 5564, or 1804) was born in Uzhhorod (Ungvar) in the Carpathian region of the Hapsburg Empire (now Ukraine). When he was eight years old, Shlomo's father, Rabbi Yosef, passed way, and Ungvar's chief rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Heller, assumed legal guardianship of Shlomo. In 5590 (1830), he abandoned his work as a wine merchant and accepted the position of Rabbi of Brezovica (Brezzevitz). In 5609 (1849), he returned to Ungvar to serve as a rabbinical judge. Realizing that the average Jew required a basic knowledge of practical Halachah (Jewish law), Rabbi Ganzfried compiled the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, an abbreviated digest of Jewish law. To this day, the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* remains a classic halachic work, and it has been translated into many languages. He passed away on 28 Tammuz 5646 (1886).

Friday, 29 Tammuz 5785 - 25 July 2025 **Passing of Rashi (1105)**

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, known as "Rashi", passed away on the 29th of Tammuz 4865 (1105). Rashi was born in Troyes, France, in 4800 (1040). His commentaries on the Torah, Prophets and Talmud are universally accepted as the most basic tool for the understanding of these texts for schoolchild and scholar alike. Numerous commentaries have been authored on his commentary. In his famed "Rashi talks", the Lubavitcher Rebbe repeatedly demonstrated how Rashi's "simple meaning of the text" style enfolds many layers of meaning, often resolving profound difficulties in the text and presenting new, innovative interpretations with a simple word choice or rephrasing of a Midrashic passage.

Shabbat, 1 Av 5785 - 26 July 2025 **Passing of Aaron (1274 BCE)**

Aaron, the first High Priest, and brother of Moses and Miriam, passed away at age 123 on the 1st of Av of 2487 (1274 BCE). This is the only Yahrzeit (date of passing) explicitly mentioned in the Torah.

Ezra Arrives in Israel (348 BCE)

Following their long journey from Babylon, Ezra and his entourage arrived in the land of Israel to be near the newly built Second Holy Temple in Jerusalem. A relatively small group came together with Ezra; the majority of Jews, including great Torah scholars, choose to remain in Babylon due to the harsh conditions that were then prevailing in Israel.