

Torah Weekly

PARSHAT MATOT-MASSEI

20 – 26 Tammuz, 5786

5 – 11 July, 2026

Matot-Massei: Numbers 30:2 - 36:13

Haftarah: Jeremiah 2:4-28;
Jeremiah 4:1-2

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

The Empowering Art of Framing

There are many positions on a baseball team, and one of the most grueling is that of the catcher, the one who crouches behind home plate and catches 100-mile-an-hour fastballs from the pitcher while cracking his kneecaps.

Baseball analysts claim that one of the most valuable things a catcher provides is something called "framing." This is the art of catching the ball in a way that when it's just off the edge of the strike zone and can be called a ball, the way the catcher positions his glove when grabbing the incoming pitch makes it look like a strike.

The moral of the story?

You, too, should be good at "framing."

Travelogue

The opening words of the Torah portion of Massei recount the Jewish journey through the desert:

These are the journeys of the children of Israel who left the land of Egypt in their legions, under the charge of Moses and Aaron.

Moses recorded their starting points for their journeys according to the word of G-d, and these were their journeys with their starting points.¹

Why is it important to list the journeys? The Torah isn't a history book, nor is it a travelogue, so what's the purpose of this list?

The Midrash explains:

It is analogous to a king whose son became sick, so he took him to a faraway place to have him healed. On the way back, the father began citing all the stages of their journey, saying to him, "This is where we sat, here we were cold, and here you had a headache." Likewise, G-d instructed Moses to list all the places the Jewish people angered G-d. Thus, it is stated, "These are the journeys."

So it turns out that recounting all the journeys was to recall the difficult times and challenges the people underwent as they traveled through the vast desert.

But that doesn't really answer our question, what's the point? Why go through the psychologically and emotionally painful process of listing these locations and their negative associations? Why bring up this national trauma now that it was all behind them and they were poised to finally enter the Promised Land?

Failure Is a Springboard

The purpose of this collective therapy session was to re-experience the pitfalls and recognize them for what they really were—springboards for growth.

To explain:

Perhaps one of the more refreshing ideas developed in the canon of Chassidic work is the notion that every "fall" is to facilitate greater growth. From things as banal as a kid on a trampoline pressing down on the fabric to soar high in the air, all the way to deep challenges of grief, pain, and trauma, it is axiomatic that such challenges exist only as a springboard to lift the protagonist to greater heights.

The thing is, however, in the thick of the challenge, it is difficult to see it. Of course, "hindsight is 20/20," so looking back, it's easy to see how losing your job pushed you to finally start your own successful business. "All's well that ends well," they tell you. But in those weeks, months, or years without a job, when you were racking up considerable debt, it's almost certain that you didn't think you were on the way up.

For this reason, it is important to pause after the fact, after you have reached safe ground and are indeed "up," to revisit the "down" and reframe it for yourself. By doing so, you are able to gain proper perspective and understand how those low moments were, in fact, exactly what you needed to bring you to the Promised Land.

And next time things go off the rails and life looks like a dumpster fire, you're ready. You know that it's only a matter of time until the sun peaks above the horizon and you inevitably fling up right through your next glass ceiling.

So, just prior to entering the Land, after a long and arduous journey replete with many "downs," the people revisited and reexamined all of those downs, now able to understand how they were really just springboards for the next and final "up"—to bring them to the doorstep of redemption.

The precision of the Midrash's analogy is now clear: The king points out all the locations with negative associations on the way back home. In the analogy of life, this is exactly how it works: on the way down, while we experience material, moral, and spiritual pitfalls, we are only able to see them as negative. It is on the climb back up that we can point and say, "Ah... now I see how losing my job was the best thing that could have happened to me!"

Proper Framing

Oh, how tremendously healing it is to be a good framer! When you take the time and effort to look through time and see how past challenges and failures are what brought you to the current plateau, it is eminently empowering.

Think back to past failures or challenging moments. If you're human, they must have happened. And now, take a moment to see if and how they were ultimately necessary steps to your next success. If you can't see it right away, be a persistent framer, and try again. Be stubborn, and you'll find it.

And when you rack up a record of failures-turned-success, you will possess an invaluable asset: practical immunity to the next challenge.

Sacred material please do not desecrate

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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Of course, if and when the inevitable hit-on-your-head comes your way it's going to hurt, it will be challenging, and it may just stretch your nerves and your wherewithal to the limit.

But you know the secret. If you're falling this hard and this low, the diving board of life is going to toss you up so high, it will be exhilarating. It's hard to see it right now, but it's right around the corner.

Hold on tight, and you'll be there very soon.

By Aharon Loschak

Daily Wisdom

Shabbat: Finding the Positive in the Negative
Seventh Reading: Leviticus 24:1-23

The Torah next recounts an incident that occurred a month after the Tabernacle was erected. In Egypt, the Jewish people carefully preserved the purity of their family life. The only woman who was violated by an Egyptian taskmaster was named Shelomit. Her son, fathered by this Egyptian, attempted to camp together with his mother Shelomit's tribe of Dan. He was refused on the grounds that tribal membership follows the father's tribal lineage, not the mother's. The case was taken to the court, who ruled against Shelomit's son, upon which he cursed G d. Thus, this section of the Torah closes with G d informing Moses of the laws regarding blasphemy and its punishment.

וְשֵׁם אִמּוֹ שְׁלֹמִית בַּת דִּבְרִי: (ויקרא כד:יא)

His mother's nickname was Shelomit bat Dibri.
Leviticus 24:11

Although the Torah only mentions this woman's nickname, it still identifies her, thereby apparently shaming her in public. Needless to say, this seems inconsistent with the Torah's rule against shaming people publicly.

In truth, however, the Torah is actually praising her by mentioning her name in connection with this incident. She was singled out by Divine providence to be one through whom the exemplary character of the rest of the Jewish women was demonstrated.

This, in fact, is one of the ways through which misdeeds can be transformed into merits – by serving as the impetus for proper behavior. The negative example set by Shelomit inspired future generations of Jewish women to live up to the example set by our ancestors in Egypt.

Translated and Adapted by Moshe Wisniewsky

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, July 5, 2026

20 Tammuz, 5786

Passing of Rabbi Avraham Chaim Na'eh (1954)

Rabbi Avraham Chaim Na'eh (1890-1954) was born in Hebron to Rabbi Menachem Mendel Na'eh, a Lubavitcher chassid and dean of the Magen Avot, a yeshiva founded by the S'dei Chemed. With the outbreak of World War One, the Ottomans, who controlled the Land of Israel at the time, expelled anyone who was not a citizen of the empire. Most of the exiled Jews, including Rabbi Avraham Chaim, gathered in Alexandria, Egypt. During his time there, Rabbi Avraham Chaim founded Yeshivat Eretz Yisrael and wrote the halachic work Shenot Chaim, a concise digest of halachah for Sephardic Jews. In 1918, he returned to Palestine to work for the Edah HaChareidit (a prominent Orthodox communal organization), under Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld.

Rabbi Na'eh best known for his halachic works Ketzot ha-Shulchan and Shiurei Torah ("measurements of the Torah"), in which he converted halachic measurements into modern terms. Contemporary halachic authorities follow his measurements to this day.

Monday, July 6, 2026

21 Tammuz, 5786

Baal Shem of Worms (1636)

The noted Kabbalist Rabbi Eliyahu ben Moshe Loanz, known as "Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem" of Worms, Germany, passed away on the 21st of Tammuz of the year 5396 from creation (1636 CE). He was a grandson of the famed shadlan (Jewish activist) R. Joselman of Rosheim, and the author of Michlal Yofi commentary on Ecclesiastes.

Tuesday, July 7, 2026

22 Tammuz, 5786

R. Shlomo of Karlin (1792)

Rabbi Shlomo (1738-1792), Chassidic Rebbe in the town of Karlin, Russia (near Pinsk), was killed in the pogroms which accompanied the Polish uprising against Russia.

Thursday, July 9, 2026

24 Tammuz, 5786

Jews of Jerusalem are set aflame (1099)

When the crusaders captured Jerusalem 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.

Friday, July 10, 2026

25 Tammuz, 5786

Passing of Rabbi Aharon Berachia of Modina (1639)

Rabbi Aharon Berachia ben Moshe of Modina (? - 1639) was an Italian Kabbalist and a student of Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano. At the request of the Burial Society at Mantua, he instituted rites for them. The author of many Kabbalistic works, he is perhaps best known for his work Ma'abar Yabbok, which contains mystical dissertations on purity and holiness. He also wrote additional prayers to be offered for the sick and the dead, as well as a code of conduct for their treatment. Many of the prayers recited at the gravesites of the deceased were composed by him.

Tradition has it that an angel called a "maggid" would come and study with him, similar to the angel that would visit Rabbi Yosef Caro.

Shabbat, July 11, 2026

26 Tammuz, 5786

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 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: R. Israel of Mezhibuzh (the Baal Shem Tov), R. Chaim Rappaport, and R. 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.