

זכור אתיום השבת לקדשו.
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SHABBAT LASHEM

THE VOICE OF BNEI AKIVA UK

PARASHAT MATOT-MAS'EI

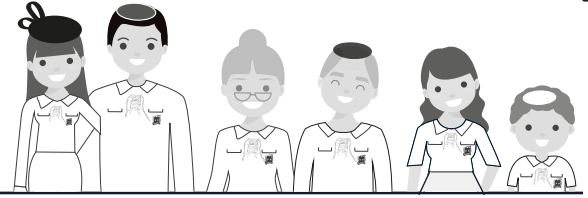
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בס"ד



YOUR JOURNEY TO GREATNESS

JONATHAN LEVENE
SHEVET DOROT

The universe is massive. Hashem created such a beautiful and mind-blowingly complex world - and with so many people. Why does He care about ME?

Let's answer this question with another one. Anyone who reads the second of this week's double *parasha*, *Matot-Mas'ei*, will notice something strange. *Parashat Mas'ei* begins in a seemingly repetitive way. Hashem spends no fewer than 49 verses listing the Jewish people's journeys through the desert, from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael*. "They left here... and encamped there." Again and again and again.

Why? By comparison, the Torah's first chapter, describing the first six days of creation (for further reading, see *Genesis and the Big Bang* by Dr Gerald Schroeder) only consists of 31! Do these journeys deserve more focus than the first six days of the creation of the world?

We can refine this question. The Torah's account of creation, says the Ramban (*Bereishit* 1:1), is a deep secret and cannot be understood by average folk like you and me. So it's general and vague. In *Parashat Masei*, it's the exact opposite - as detailed as possible! In fact, the *Or HaChaim* (23:5) tells us that not a single journey from the entire 40 years in the desert was left out! Why does this account of our journeys deserve more focus - and much more detail - than even the first six days of creation?

The *Sefat Emet* says, in multiple places, that the Jewish people were *נוהלך*; always moving forward from one place to the next to try to get closer to

Eretz Yisrael. So too, everyone must be a *נוהלך*, constantly growing as an individual, from one level to the next. These journeys represent every step of your journey to greatness. Perhaps we can suggest the following: Hashem could spend volumes focusing on His own greatness. Look what a world I created. Complex, rich and beautiful. Look at the massive galaxies, the microscopic cells, the incredible flora and fauna. The human brain. Hashem does need to tell us He created the world. It's a key part of our worldview, but He says it very briefly.

To Hashem, more precious than talking about His creation is seeing its purpose being fulfilled: our creation of ourselves., both as a nation and as individuals. Yes, I created the world, says Hashem, but what are you doing with it? What are you making of it? What are you making of YOU?

To Hashem, one positive choice, one movement of growth, is bigger than any galaxy.

Does He care about you? Not only does Hashem care and not only does He love you; He cherishes every "tiny" step you take. He doesn't leave a single one out. They're far from tiny; you're the pinnacle and purpose of it all!

So too, says the *Sefat Emet*, we must appreciate every stage of our own journey. Right now, at the beginning, we can be proud of how we've grown so far. And at this crucial time, when we make life decisions, we must ensure that our choices now mean we will have many more steps and much more growth to be proud of in the future.

JONATHAN IS IN SHEVET DOROT AND WILL BE SGAN OF MACHANE ARI 5783

THREE WEEKS FOR THREE WEEKS

PART 2: A MOTHER'S LOVE IS EVERYTHING



It is hard for us in our days to understand and really feel the lack of *Beit Hamikdash*. Generally speaking, our lives are great- we live in modern times, in liberal and democratic countries, and have a lot of good in our life.

The poorest people around us have so much more in their lives than many members of the upper-class living five centuries ago. Compared to the days of yore, many of us have pleasant jobs, we enjoy families and kids, and have the ability to do so much more than anyone in history could.

What language can I use to explain why we need the *Beit Hamikdash* and why the world would be so much better with it built? The only way is to talk about what the *Beit Hamikdash* will provide rather than about the building itself. Still, we will need to illustrate this by using something that we know, and therefore feel, so that we can really connect to this concept.

Hashem tells us (*Shemot* 25:8) that the building of a *mishkan*, then to be a *mikdash*, is for the purpose of Him dwelling among us, as the *pasuk* says regarding the *shekhina*: וּשְׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם. This means, that even though Hashem has no body and is not bound by any materialistic limits, there still is an inability for Him to totally dwell among us without the *mikdash*. There are many explanations to this phenomenon, most of them correctly “blaming” our materialistic dimension, but that isn't the goal here.

All we need to take from here is that with *Beit Hamikdash* built, we have more *shekhina*. But this is the easy part. To just know this fact isn't hard, as I can fill the rest of the article with quotes from *Chazal* reiterating this. But that isn't the point – the point is to **connect** us to this lack of *shekhina* in our lives today. How can we do that? How do we understand that even though it seems we have everything, we really have nothing?

We must illustrate in our minds something as powerful as that. The one and only thing that matches it is mother's love. This is maybe easier

for those whose mothers have died, but it is important for all to try and connect to the feeling. Take a moment, close your eyes, and imagine that at the peak time of your relationship with your mother, something takes her away from you. Imagine the hurt, the panic, the burn in your heart every time she comes to your mind. Imagine how empty everything in your life seems, because the warmth, the care, all that motherhood is about – it is all gone. And you have no idea if it is ever coming back. Let's just make this a bit harsher: add to that image the understanding that everything that happened to your mother- is all your fault! How much worse does that make everything, every memory, every thought or event connected to her!?

Yeshayahu tells us this exact idea (50:1):

הוּ בְּצוֹנְתֵיכֶם נִמְכַרְתֶּם
וּבְפִשְׁעֵיכֶם שְׁלַחָה אֶמְכָּר

'For your transgressions your mother was sent away.'

The connection between *shekhina* and Am Yisrael is expressed in the way of the relationship between a mother and a child.

Chazal in the *Zohar HaKadosh* (*Zohar Chadash, Ruth*, 94b)

state that this is the inner meaning of *shilluach haken* (sending away the mother bird), and that when performing this *mitzva* one should have in mind the pain of *shekhina* and *Am Yisrael* being separated from each other.

So the first thing to do, even before taking actual steps, is to take in this painful feeling, that we can all somewhat relate to, and then insert it into these days. Once we have a correct understanding of how significant the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* is, we can move forward to mourning it, and taking active steps to re-build it again. More about that next week, in the final part of this piece, as we pull out of the three weeks.

**RAV AVICHAH GOODMAN IS IN SHEVET NETZACH AND IS THE RAV SHALIACH OF BNEI AKIVA.
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ISRAEL MACHANE PHOTO SHOOT PT. 2



Group 1 at the Kotel,
Group 3 volunteering
at a Leket field!



TORAH FROM AROUND THE WORLD ASENATH BARZANI | CA. 1590-1670

Between 1951 and 1952, Israel airlifted over 120,000 Jews from Iraq away from their increasingly hostile native lands into the safety of the Jewish state. This time, we'll travel in the opposite direction, land in Baghdad and travel up Highway 1 to Mosul to the first female *rosh yeshiva*.

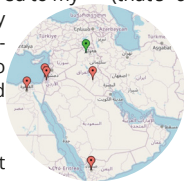
Asenath Barzani is considered one of the most prominent female Jewish scholars since the exile. Born into a well-known family in Kurdistan, her father Rav Shemuel Barzani travelled around Kurdistan, attempting to raise the level of general Jewish scholarship by establishing *yeshivot* in Barzan, Aqrah, Amedi and Mosul; the latter being where he concluded his travels, and he subsequently assumed the position of head of the Mosul *yeshiva*. Shemuel Barzani had no sons, but he had one daughter, Asenath. He therefore passed all of his Torah knowledge on to her and she was trained to the highest level of scholarship in all areas of study, including *halakha*, Talmud and Kabbala. Asenath writes about this time, describing how she 'never left the entrance to my house or went outside; I was like a princess of Israel... I grew up on the laps of scholars, anchored to my father... I was never taught any work but holy study.' In this way, she inverted the usual understanding of a woman never leaving the house to instead mean that Torah education was delivered right to her doorstep.

However, her studies and achievements did not stop there. Barzani married her first cousin, Ya'akov Mizrachi, her father's most prominent disciple. Written into the marriage document was a stipulation by her father that she be left free to continue her studies. Mizrachi was appointed by his father-in-law to teach in the *yeshiva*, but he was too busy with his own studies and so Barzani taught instead. When her father died, her husband Mizrachi became by default head of the *yeshiva*, but it was Barzani who now taught the Rabbinical students and qualified them as rabbis. After Mizrachi died, Barzani became the official *rosh yeshiva* herself. There are no records that suggest that she faced any opposition to her appointment due to being a woman. In addition to training the rabbis of the *yeshiva*, Barzani managed the funds of the *yeshiva* and wrote to secure money from external donors. She viewed it as improper for her, as a woman, to travel around different countries looking for money, referring again to her existence as a 'princess of Israel' who did not leave the *yeshiva*.

Letters written to her show the prominence of both Barzani and of her *yeshiva*. In one letter, the community of Bagh-

dad requests that she select a top student of her *yeshiva* and send him to them to be their rabbi. In another, a Kurdish rabbi named Pinechas Hariri refers to her with the acronym *כנווריה"ר*, a standard appellation for greatly esteemed rabbinic authorities, which (in the feminine) would stand for *כבוד מורתינו ורבניתינו הרבנית רבה*, giving her the titles of 'our teacher (f.)', 'our *rabbanit* (f. form similar to *rabbi*)' and '*rabba*' (f. of *rav*). Elsewhere, she is also called *tanna'it*, the feminine form of *tanna*, Aramaic for 'teacher'. Hariri continues the letter in the respectful and highly deferential fashion that would be expected for any male *rosh yeshiva*.

The above is not to say, however, that in later years her gender did not play a more significant role. After her death (that's usually when these things start), many legends arose about Asenath's 'mystical powers' and certain stories have been discovered written in protective amulets. One relates that, after having one boy and one girl (her husband's minimum halakhic requirement), she 'prayed to God to stop her menses' so that she would be free to study without too much of a burden of raising children. However, we know that she had at least



two daughters and one son, so it appears this story arose from an inability to believe that she could be both a mother and an accomplished Torah scholar. Another amulet contains a story about how, when she was hanging out her laundry, a gentile saw her and that night came to rape her. She 'called out the names of the holy ones, and... the gentile became stuck on the walls of the roof.' Here as well we are presented with an inaccuracy, as from what we have seen above, we know that she did not perform housework such as hanging out laundry. Again, her gender has led to the creation of stories around her that play on ideas of her role as a woman and the perceived inherent sexuality thereof. Even in more recent times, when her letters were first rediscovered by Erich Bauer, he decided that the elevated prose and complex interweaving of Biblical and Rabbinic phrases found in her letters and poetry meant that it would have been impossible for a woman to have written them! In reality, she was following in the footsteps of her father, who was also known to be a proficient poet. She is also believed to have written a commentary on *Mishlei*, but this work has been lost.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

- **Shabbat shoutout** to our **Israel Machane** groups, this week in **Beit-Shean** (Group 1), **Manara** (Group 2), **Jerusalem** (Group 3) & **Katzrin** (Group 4)!

- **Veida motions** are now open! To **submit a motion** or **apply for a position** within Bnei Akiva, and for more details, please visit **bauk.org/veida**.

- We will be making a **siyum Tanakh** on pre-camp in memory of former mazkir **Marc Weinberg z"l**. To sign up, please visit **tinyurl.com/siyum-5783**.

- Applications have reopened for **Israel &**

Communities worker, please email **mazkir@bauk.org** or visit **bauk.org/vacancies** for more information.

- **Summer Machane** applications are still open! Visit **bauk.org/camps** to sign up.

- To give any **comments** or **suggestions** to Bnei Akiva, please visit **bauk.org/feedback**.

- To keep up-to-date with all our latest events and announcements, make sure you're following us on **Facebook** and **Instagram!**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THESE EVENTS, PLEASE CONTACT BEN AT CHINUCH@BAUK.ORG

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in memory of former Mazkir Marc Weinberg z"l

The graphic at the bottom shows a stylized representation of books or scrolls, with various colored blocks (purple, yellow, black) arranged in a row, suggesting the structure of the Tanakh.

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