



MATOT-MASEI

WHY IT REALLY HURTS

Understanding the Source of Our Pain—And How to Heal It

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Matot–Masei

Moses conveys to the heads of the tribes of Israel the laws governing the annulment of vows.

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 among 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 River 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.

The forty-two journeys and encampments of Israel are listed, from the Exodus to their encampment on the plains of Mo'ab across the river from the land of Canaan.

Also in *Masei*: The boundaries of the Promised Land are given, and cities of refuge are designated as havens and

places of exile for inadvertent murderers. The daughters of Zelophehad marry within their own tribe of Manasseh, so that the estate that they inherit from their father should not pass to another tribe.



Imagine you want to motivate your teenage child to do a positive thing. What would be your best argument to motivate them to do it?

TEXT 1

Numbers 31:1–4

א. וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר.

ב. נָקֶם נִקְמַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֵת הַמִּדְיָנִים אַחַר תִּאָּסֵף אֶל עַמִּיךָ.

ג. וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם לֵאמֹר הִחַלְצוּ מֵאִתְּכֶם אַנְשִׁים לְצָבָא, וַיְהִיו עַל מִדְיָן לְתֵת נִקְמַת ה' בְּמִדְיָן.

ד. אֶלֶף לַמָּטֵה אֶלֶף לַמָּטֵה לְכָל מִטּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׁלְחוּ לְצָבָא.

1. G-d spoke to Moses saying:
2. “Take revenge for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterward, you will be gathered to your people.”
3. So Moses spoke to the people, saying, “Arm from among you men for the army that they can be against Midian, and carry out the revenge of G-d against Midian.
4. “A thousand for each tribe, a thousand for each tribe, from all the tribes of Israel you shall send into the army.”

QUESTION

When G-d tells Moses to wage war against Midian, He speaks of avenging the Jewish people's honor. However, when Moses relays the message to the people, he talks of avenging *G-d's* honor.

Why did Moses change to something less relatable: avenging G-d's honor instead of their own?

TEXT 2

*Rabbi Yechiel Michel
Epstein, Aruch
Hashulchan, Even
Ha'ezer 126:16*

וזה וודאי נראה לעניות דעתי דאם כתב מנחם אב דכשר
בדיעבד, כיון דכן מברכין החדש בכל מדינותינו וכן כותבין
באגרות.

It seems quite clear to me that if someone writes “Menachem Av” in a contract, it is valid, for that is the name we use to bless the month in all our communities, as well as in private letters.



QUESTION

Why call the current month Menachem Av, “comforting the Father?”

Why speak of G-d’s need for comfort when we, the people, could use comfort as well for the tragedies suffered in Exile?

TEXT 3

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of Prayer
1:2*

חַיּוּב מִצְוָה זֹאת כָּךְ הוּא, שְׂיֵהָא אָדָם מִתְחִינן וּמְתַפְּלִיל בְּכָל יוֹם וּמְגִיד
שְׁבַחֹו שְׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וְאַחַר כֵּן שׂוֹאֵל צְרָכָיו שְׂהוּא צָרִיךְ
לָהֶם בְּבִקְשָׁה וּבִתְחִנָּה, וְאַחַר כֵּן נוֹתֵן שְׁבַח וְהוֹדָיָה לֵה' עַל הַטּוֹבָה
שְׂהַשְׁפִּיעַ לוֹ כָּל אֶחָד לְפִי כָחוֹ.

This commandment obligates each person to offer supplication and prayer every day, and utter praises of the Holy One, blessed be He; then petition for all of his or her needs with requests and supplications; and, finally, to give praise and thanks to G-d for the goodness He has bestowed upon him or her, each one according to their own ability.

We should pray for the things G-d is lacking, for His revealed and overt presence to be restored, and for the world to be His home.



TEXT 4

*Rabbi Dovber of
Mezeritch, Or Torah,
Vayigash, 56*

בעומדו להתפלל לפני ה' יתברך ככה יתנהג, רוצה לומר, שיהיה כל כוונת תפלתו להשפיע בשכינת עוזו.

וזהו שאמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה: "אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כובד ראש", היינו כובד של רישא דכל רישין. ואף שמבקש בקשת צרכי עצמו, יהיה כוונתו שלא יחסר הדבר לעילא חס ושלום.

This is a how a person should behave as they stand before G-d in prayer: their sole intention should be to bestow energy into the *Shechinah*.

This, then, is what the Talmud states: "One may only stand and pray with seriousness (lit., 'heavy head')"; in other words, the Head of all heads—G-d. Though a Jew requests their own needs, they should have in mind that G-d on High should lack nothing.

TEXT 5

*Rabbi Yitzchak ben
Sheshet, Teshuvat
Rivash, 157*

אני מתפלל לדעת זה התינוק.

I pray with the mind of an infant.

QUESTION

The Magid taught that when a Jew prays, they should pray for G-d's needs.

How can we expect that from an average Jew? Doesn't that contradict the Halachic definition of prayer which is to ask for our own human needs?

TEXT 6

Deuteronomy 14:1

בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

You are children to G-d.

TEXT 7

Mishnah, Sanhedrin 6:5

אמר רבי מאיר: בשעה שאדם מצטער, שכינה
מה לשון אומרת? קלני מראשי, קלני מזרועי.

Rabbi Me'ir said, “When a person is in pain,
what does the *Shechinah* say? ‘My head
hurts; my arm hurts.’”



G-d animates everything in creation, from the tiniest molecules to the greatest galaxies.

But there are differences in quantity and quality of the G-dly energy that sustains different types of creation.

TEXT 8

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Tanya, Likutei
Amarim, ch. 38*

ודרך כלל נחלקות לארבע מדרגות: דומם צומח חי מדבר, כנגד ד'
אותיות שם הוי"ה ברוך הוא שממנו מושפעים. וכמו שאין ערך
ודמיון ההארה והמשכת החיות שבדומם וצומח להארה והמשכת
החיות המלובשת בחי ומדבר.

Broadly speaking, there are four taxonomies in this world: mineral, plant, animal, and human. They correspond to the four letters of G-d's ineffable name from which they are animated. One cannot compare the G-dly energy that animates minerals and plants to the G-dly energy that animates animals and humans.

Tzimtzum

G-d's infinite energy is
"self-screened."

There are different
degrees of minimization
of G-dly energy before
it flows down to create
and sustain something.



Giluyim

“Revelations”

There are different manifestations of G-dly energy due to the various minimizations of G-dly energy.



TEXT 9

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, Derech Mitzvotcha, Shores Mitzvot Hatefilah, p. 116a

שהאור אין סוף אינו משפיע החיות בהעולמות כי אם על ידי הספירות הנזכרות לעיל, שהן הכלים להגיע החיות אצל הנבראים . . . הרי מבואר שההשפעה הנמשכת מאור אין סוף להעולמות על ידי הכלים הנזכרים לעיל, הנקראים ' ספירות דאצילות, היא נעשית ומתצמצמת לפי ערך הכלי להיות בבחינת גבול ותכלית, ולא כמו שהאור אין סוף עצמו הוא בלי גבול כו'.

וממילא מובן שהיא גם כן נעשית ונשפעת כפי תמונת ומהות הכלי שעל ידה נשפעת, כגון ההשפעה הנמשכת על ידי כלי החסד נהוו ממנה ברואים המורים על מדת החסד, כגון האור והמים כו' . . . וכן בשאר כל המדות.

G-dly energy flows to this world through a medium called *sefirot*, which are vehicles G-d created to carry life to creation. . . . Now, the G-dly energy that flows through these ten *sefirot* is limited to, and defined by, the contours of the vehicle, as opposed to the infinite light of G-d Himself, which is unlimited and undefined.

It follows, then, that the G-dly energy is also shaped by the characteristics of the vehicle through which it flows. For example, the energy flowing through the supernal vehicle of *Chesed*, kindness, creates entities that display properties of kindness, like light and water. . . . And so it is with the other supernal vehicles and their characteristics.



The life force of us
humans comes
directly from *Atzmut*,
the essence of G-d.

TEXT 10

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber
Schneersohn, Torat
Shalom, p. 120*

וואס אין גוף דוקא שטייט דער כח העצמות פון
אור אין סוף ברוך הוא.

It is specifically in the human body where
the infinite energy of G-d's very essence is
expressed.

TEXT 11

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber
Schneersohn, Ibid., p. 11*

נאר אז ער ברעכט — ברעכט ער חלילה דעם גוף, ווארום ער איז שייך צום גוף, ער אליין — איז שייך צו גשמיות דוקא, א"ק עקודים נקודים דאס איז שייך צו דער נשמה, ער אליין איז שייך צום גוף, ער אליין איז גוף, ווארום צו מאכען א גוף איז נאר בכחו ויכלתו.

When G-d is in distress, it breaks the physical body, for G-d is most associated with the physical body. The essence of G-d Himself most relates to materialism. All other lofty, spiritual levels are associated with the soul, but the essence of G-d Himself is associated with the body, for only G-d Himself can create a physical body.

The essence of G-d
Himself is associated
with the physical body.

Thus, when we
feel pain, it is a
direct manifestation
of G-d's pain.



ANSWER

Our material needs and G-d's need to be more present in this world are one and the same.

Asking for one brings about the other.

TEXT 12A

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Torat
Menachem 5713:2, p. 345*

דהנה, כשיש חסרון למטה יש גם חסרון למעלה, כמאמר רבותינו זכרונם לברכה: "בשעה שאדם מצטער שכינה מה לשון אומרת, קלני מראשי קלני מזרועי" . . . ולזה צריך להיות התפלה על החסרון דלמעלה, וכאשר יתמלא החסרון שלמעלה, אזי במילא יתמלא גם החסרון למטה, דכיון שכללות החסרון למטה הוא מצד החסרון למעלה, לכן כשיתמלא החסרון שלמעלה יתמלא ממילא החסרון למטה.

When we feel distress in our world, it's an indication of distress on High, as our sages stated, "When a person is in pain, what does the *Shechinah* say? 'My head hurts; my arm hurts.'" . . . This, then, is what we should be praying for: the needs of G-d on High. When that need is fulfilled, it will automatically resolve our needs down here, as our needs are a result of G-d's needs. Solving the need on High automatically solves the need down below.

TEXT 12B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 23, p. 220*

ובמילא ווען א איד איז מרגיש דעם חסרון בצרכי הגוף שלו און
דאס ברענגט אים צו מתפלל זיין להקדוש ברוך הוא, איז דאס
בפנימיות ובאמיתית מצד דעם וואס פנימיותו פילט אמיתית ענינו
— בחירת העצמות וואס איז אין גוף הגשמי דוקא.

When a Jew senses a material need, they instinctively pray to G-d. The deeper, truer story behind this is that a Jew intuitively feels where they come from—G-d's close association with a Jew's physical body.



ANSWER

We call the current month Menachem Av, “comforting the Father,” to remind us where pain really comes from and where comfort truly needs to begin—with restoring G-d’s presence in the world.

ANSWER

Moses spoke of battling Midian to comfort G-d in order to let the people know that the source of our own comfort comes from honoring and comforting G-d.



When you're hurting, pray
for a brighter, more
spiritual world.

Such a prayer will certainly
be welcomed by G-d.

TEXT 13

*Rabbi Dovber of
Mezeritch, Or Torah,
Vayigash 56*

וזהו עיקר הבקשה שימולא ויושפע לעילא, ובודאי
בזה תפלתו רצויה ואין שטן מקטרג עליה.

A Jew's primary request when they pray is for G-d's needs to be fulfilled on High. Such a prayer will most certainly be accepted on High, and nothing can prosecute against it.

KEY POINTS

1. There are multiple instances where we find Judaism opting for what seem to be *less* relevant terms and language, speaking of comforting G-d instead of ourselves.
2. The Magid taught that when we pray, instead of praying for our own needs and pain, we should ask for G-d to be comforted, for *His* pain to be healed.
3. When G-d created—and continues to create—the world, it involved an immense and intense amount of *tzimtzum*, a process in which G-d contracts and screens Himself from those creatures. Within that process, there's a spectrum of how much G-d screens Himself to create, and relate to, a specific creation.
4. The entire spectrum of G-dly energy as it relates to creation is limited to a mere manifestation of G-d, what the kabbalists called *giluy*.
5. The essence of G-d Himself, what's called *Atzmut*, remains aloof from creation.

KEY POINTS

6. The body of a Jew stands out from all of creation in that it is directly related to *Atzmut*.
7. When a Jew feels pain, it is a direct manifestation of G-d's pain. When we pray, we ought to pray for G-d's comfort, which will automatically bring our own.

