

# Parasha Meditation Matot-Masai

**Bamidbar 30:1-36:13**

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

## What is the Purpose for Every Place on our Path?

### Introduction

#### Following the Cloud Throughout the Journeys of our Lives

“The children of Israel traveled from Ra’amases and encamped in Sukkot. They traveled from Sukkot and encamped in Etham, at the edge of the wilderness. They travelled from Etham, and turned back unto Pi hachiroth, which is before Ba’al-Zephon; and they encamped before Migdol...”<sup>1</sup> Why does the Torah go into trouble by keep mentioning the place from where they journeyed – a mere repetition of the previous arrival place? Sforno explains that both the encamping and decamping were immensely trying. It was extremely difficult to have to leave a place suddenly without much time to prepare. Sometimes the next location would be worse than the place they came from, and sometimes the opposite. This is why at each stop, it mentions both the place they left and their arrival place;<sup>2</sup> teaching us about their steadfast *emunah* to follow the cloud. “By Hashem’s word they camped, and by Hashem’s word they traveled.”<sup>3</sup> I admire my students, many of whom still follow the cloud, moving from place to place according to the signs they receive from Hashem.

#### Israel’s Desert Wanderings Paved the Way for Future Exiles

The travels of the children of Israel in the wilderness may be a pre-cursor that paved the way for the Jews to have the strength to go through centuries of exile, in the desert of the Diaspora. During our long winding exile, sojourning in one country, and the necessity to leave on sudden notice, is like our encampment in the desert, by Divine decree. Actually the beginning of the first verse of *Parashat Masei* is an acronym for the four main exiles of Jewish history: **E**dom (Rome), **M**edia, **B**abylon and **Y**avan (Greece). אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל / *Ele Masei B’nei Yisrael* – “These are the journeys of the children of Israel.”<sup>4</sup> These were also wanderings in “places of snakes and vipers, scorpions and thirst,”<sup>5</sup> where our very survival was miraculous. “Snakes” correspond to Babylon, “vipers” to Media, “scorpions” to Greece and “thirst” to Edom – our current exile. These four exiles are also hinted in the first verse of the creation story.<sup>6</sup> From this we learn that our exiles were not a punishment but rather ingrained in the very order of creation in order to purify the people of Israel. All our suffering throughout Jewish history comes only to elevate us to a higher

<sup>1</sup> *Bamidbar* 33:5-7.

<sup>2</sup> Sforno, *Bamidbar* 33:2.

<sup>3</sup> *Bamidbar* 9:20.

<sup>4</sup> *Bamidbar* 33:1.

<sup>5</sup> *Devarim* 8:15.

<sup>6</sup> *Bereishit* 1:2. “Desolate” corresponds to Babylon, “void” to Media, “darkness” to Greece, “upon the face of the depth” to Edom “the Spirit of G\*d hovering over the water” to Mashiach (*Bereishit Rabah* 2:4)



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level.<sup>7</sup> Personally, I have also experienced a tiny drop of this purification process. After making *Aliyah* and living as a family in Israel for seven years, it was quite a shock when my husband received a court-order to work in a physician shortage area in USA, in order to pay back his conditional scholarship. Returning back to Israel once the service had ended was also not easy. It seems like North America is imbued with magnetic power to hold on to people which makes it hard to leave its comforts. Perhaps this has begun to change, as the sparks are being emptied out of there, like in Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

### Extracting Holy Sparks

The *Parasha* opens up by listing the forty-two different stations that the Israelites encamped during their forty years desert wandering. Why did the children of Israel stay very briefly in some places, while in others, such as Kadesh, they stayed for nineteen years?<sup>9</sup> The reason is that Israel's journey in the wilderness was in order to extract holy sparks. Desolate places void of people are hosts to snakes, vipers, scorpions and impure forces that subjugate holy sparks. Hashem's people had to wander there in order to extract these trapped sparks. Therefore, Israel would encamp one year in one place, while only twelve hours in another. The length of stay at each station was according to how much time was needed to extract the particular sparks trapped there.

### Qualifications for Extracting Sparks

The Torah states: "These are the journeys of the children of Israel, who came out of the land of Egypt, by their hosts under the hand of Moshe and Aharon." This verse teaches us about the Israelites qualifications to extract holy sparks. 1. "...who came out of the land of Egypt" – They had been purified by the iron furnace of their suffering in Egypt. 2. "...by their hosts" – They were united as a complete unite consisting of six hundred thousand Israelites, which connected them to the *Shechinah* (Feminine in-dwelling presence). 3. "...under the hand of Moshe and Aharon." Moshe is considered the tree through which the six hundred thousand Israelite souls would shine. Whenever they would travel everything holy similar to the holiness of the Israelites would be attached to them.<sup>10</sup>

### Impure Environment – Perfect Backdrop for Elevation

The higher something is, the lower it falls. Today we are also surrounded by impurity all around us, making our world filled with negative lower forces – a perfect breeding place for fallen sparks. By strengthening *emunah*, and actively searching for Hashem in whatever situation and place we may be lost, we extract and elevate sparks.

<sup>7</sup> *Netivat Shalom* on *Parashat Masei*, pp. 185-186.

<sup>8</sup> See *Shemot* 12:36: "They despoiled the Egyptians." Rashi: "They emptied it." See also Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, *Beit Olamin*, p. 134b: "The children of Israel elevated with them all the holy sparks that were in the husk of Egypt." This is why it is not permitted to return to Egypt, since there are no more sparks to extract there. (Rabbi Naftali Hertz, *Emek Hamelech*, sha'ar 14, chapter 117).

<sup>9</sup> See Rashi, *Devarim* 1:46.

<sup>10</sup> This entire paragraph is based on *Ohr Hachayim*, (Rabbi Chayim Atar) on the Torah, *Bamidbar* 33:1.

## Meditation:

Make yourself comfortable, close your eyes and breathe slowly. Let all thoughts and background noises pass through you, as you inhale and exhale slowly and rhythmically.

1. Visualize the word מַסַּי/*masai* – my journeys.

Inhale מַס/*mas*, exhale אֵי/*ai*.

2. Repeat over and over forty-two times, or as long as you have the strength.

3. Visualize the *mem* as a flowing stream of water, the *samech* as a protective enclosure during all your journeys. Reach new vistas with the eye of the *ayin*, and integrate it into your personal experience with the possessive *yud*, which stands for “my.” מַסַּי/*masai* – my journeys.

4. Connect with the concept that Hashem brings you to key places, ordeals and crossroads in life in order to elevate you.

5. Go back in time – to the very first place you remember living. Realize how this place was an opportunity for *tikun* (rectification) and self-perfection.

6. Think about each of the challenges you faced in this place.

7. In your mind’s eye send Hashem’s light to each of these challenges, accepting that they were Divinely sent in order to purify you.

8. Allow yourself to access how each of these challenges helped you grow, which character-trait did they help you develop?

9. Reframe each challenge as being the best and most inspiring opening. Feel how it was sent by Hashem as an opportunity to connect even deeper with G-d and with the Divine aspect of yourself.

10. You may repeat step 5-9 with other places you lived, possibly in subsequent meditation sessions. Complete the meditation by sending Hashem’s light to each of the places you meditated on, and then send Hashem’s light to the place you live in now, realizing that where you are at this point in your life, is only due to everything you have gone through on all of your previous journeys.

## Notes:

“These are the journeys of the Israelites, who had left Egypt”<sup>11</sup> on the way to the Holy Land. The forty-two journeys from Egypt to the Land of Israel parallel the phases each person experiences throughout life. Each journey is about freeing ourselves, transcending the constraints (*Mitzrayim*) which conceal G\*d and His Divine light from us. Throughout each of our journeys we have the ability to subdue and sublimate the forces of evil that hold us back from achieving our spiritual potential. Let us be mindful throughout our journeys and phases in life, so that we may learn to harmonize between our body and soul, through open revelation of Hashem!

<sup>11</sup> Bamidbar 33:1.

# About Us



## **Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum**

*Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work. For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.*

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*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

*Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.*

*If you are interested in:*

*Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin contact [info@berotbatayin.org](mailto:info@berotbatayin.org) or in Spiritual Healing with Rebbetzin Chana Bracha, please contact her at [director@berotbatayin.org](mailto:director@berotbatayin.org)*

*or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>*

## **Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin – Holistic Torah Study for Women on the Land of Israel**

At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

## **Come Learn With Us!**

Beginner and advanced levels are offered for women of all ages and religious backgrounds. Whether your interest in Judaism has recently been ignited, or you are seeking a wider perspective, Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin offers the opportunity to improve your learning skills while strengthening your commitment to Judaism within the parameters of Halachah – all while engaging your inner creative spirituality, working the Land, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

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You have the unique opportunity to help us continue to build and amplify the light of Torah on the Land of Israel. With your help we can increase our ability to provide women an extraordinary Torah environment where they can build a solid Jewish foundation which will have an impact for generations to come.

