

Near the end of the Book of Devoreem (Numbers) in the Sedra of Mattos we have recounted a very interesting episode. The Bnei Yisroel, the Jewish people, have completed the conquest of TransJordan and are about ready to enter the Promised Land, the land on the other side of the Jordan. Moshe has been told that his days are numbered, and he has already appointed Joshua as his successor. It was then at this point in Jewish history when the promise that G-d had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was to be vindicated. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Mannaseh stepped forward and told Moses that they did not want to enter into the Promised Land, but that they would like to settle in the rich TransJordan plain, the other side of the Jordan. At first Moshe was aghast and severely chastized them for repeating the grievous sin of the generation who died in the wilderness - their lack of faith in their ability with G-d's help to conquer the land. These two and a half tribes quickly put Moses' mind to rest by reminding him that they were shepherds and that the land of TransJordan was perfect for grazing and that far from shirking their duty, they were willing to send all their armed men to fight with the other tribes until the land of Israel was subdued. All they wanted, and this is what is interesting, was to build pens for their sheep and fortified cities for their children first.

Sometimes we today, in our zeal to help our brethren elsewhere, especially in the land of Israel (and we would be committing a terrible sin if we would not), forget that we must secure our children. I am sure that none of us forget to pen our sheep - secure our livelihood. We fail to provide an education and educational facilities for our children. This we must do otherwise we may help others secure their places, but ours will be lost.

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Many people have come to me and said, "Rabbi, what I expect from religion is peace of mind, what I expect is that my religion will cause me to be at peace with myself and with my surroundings and will assure that I will have no more anxieties and, what's more, that's what I expect of a Synagogue service, too. I expect to find in a Synagogue service peace and serenity, an uplifting otherworldly experience which will free me from all emotional turmoil and care". These people may believe that this is the function of religion and religious services but this is not Judaism's concept of religion or religious services. The Jewish religion does not offer peace of mind and does not even claim that this is something worth striving for.

Other religions may strive in their religious services to transport man to a heavenly setting. We try the exact opposite. We try to bring G-d down to earth. That's why aesthetics have never been a major concern of Jewish worship. Aesthetics are meant to influence the worshipper from the outside, to take the worshipper from where he is and to transport him to a different realm which will then leave its impress on him when he descends back down to earthly concerns. Jewish worship has been concerned with man in the midst of his earthly human concerns, and strives to influence the worshipper from the inside, from where he is. It does not try to transport man up to heaven. What it tries to do is to bring G-d down to earth. It tries to say that we can sanctify even our weaknesses, that G-d is with us even in our troubles as long as we strive to lead the moral life. It does not try to remove our humanity from us. It, instead, tries to impress upon us that in spite of our troubles and because, and only because, we are human can we serve G-d and do great things. In other words, we do not try to escape our human condition but we say that it is because of our human condition that G-d wants and needs us as His junior partner in creation.

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Judaism does not try to escape the world. It tries to sanctify it. Because we are in this world, we are going to be met with inevitable frustration and pain, but this should not deter us. It should not cause us to despair and it should not cause us to lose hope. The purpose of religion, as we see it, is not to give us peace of mind but to allow us to be G-d's partner in creation. Being creative is, in itself, very anxiety-producing. We are always trying to improve, to do better. If we have complete peace of mind, according to Judaism, something is the matter with us. We have failed religiously.

Our religion should always make us feel a little uncomfortable. That's why even though a Sefer Torah is our most precious object, it is not to be venerated. We do not worship it. Physical contact with a Torah will not purify us. In fact, the exact opposite is true. When a person touches a Sefer Torah he becomes ritually impure. Ritual impurity was a psychological state not a moral state. Any time we would touch the dead or come into contact with things that might depress us or cause us to lose hope, we became ritually unclean. The Torah, too, may make us feel uncomfortable because we know we are not living up to everything in it, but <sup>written</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>the Torah</sup> is

? supposed to <sup>make us feel uncomfortable</sup> It is not supposed to give us peace of mind. It is supposed to give us meaning and purpose and goals in this life. Peace of mind

~~actually~~ does not bring happiness, <sup>Working</sup> for positive goals with others ~~is~~

? <sup>brings happiness</sup> ~~does~~. Jewish worship is, also, meant to stress the fact that we must be creative. Jewish prayer is not passive. Everybody says the <sup>all words of G-d</sup> prayer, and the Cantor ~~only~~ <sup>just</sup> repeats the last line. It, also, stresses that we live in this world surrounded by others, that we need them and that they need us.

A Minyon is necessary for worship. Every Jew prays himself, but the prayers <sup>in</sup> of others around him strengthens and helps him.

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Many of these thoughts are found in the Torah portion, Massey, which talks about the stages of the journey of the Jewish people from Egypt to Israel. It says "that they went from place to place" without going into great detail. It states, "and these are their Maasayhem L'Motzeayhem," their journeys according to their going forths." We have here a redundant expression. It would have been sufficient to just say "according to their going forths" or "according to their journeys," but the idea expressed here is that life, itself, is a journey. Nothing is static in life. We cannot have peace of mind. We cannot create islands of time and even of place. The winds blow and the storms come and nothing ever remains exactly the same. Our journey in life, though, should be marked by our going forths, by our endeavors to mold and shape the forces about us so that they will be beneficial and productive and produce a more balanced and better world.

The Jewish religion's primary concern is with balance, with synthesis. That's why in every generation we need to have Halachic authorities and cannot rely wholly on the past. All the forces must be constantly evaluated. We have a living Torah. Precedent, per se, is not binding in Jewish law. That is the reason there is no conflict between science and religion. Science tries to analyze how everything works. Our religion strives to put everything together. Judaism is not primarily interested in how things are or were but what man, ~~we~~, should do now. New discoveries, new modes of life must always be taken into consideration and brought into the consensus. We are not Amish who reject electricity or automobiles, etc. but all new knowledge must be brought and applied within the Jewish framework. This requires effort and striving. We will never be finished with the job and we will never be able to achieve so-called peace of mind. Our religion calls for continuous creativity.

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During this month we will observe the fast of Shiva Oser B'Tamuz which commemorates the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem which culminated in the destruction of the Temple. It, also, commemorates the breaking of the first tablets of the Ten Commandments which were given to Moses. Moshe had no difficulty breaking these tablets even though they were given to him by G-d because they, intrinsically, <sup>they</sup> were of no value. Their only value <sup>lay</sup> ~~was~~ in teaching people how to live. The people who worshipped the Golden Calf thought they could gain security and peace of mind worshipping the Golden Calf. The Ten Commandments were not for them. The Ten Commandments can only be given to those who realize that what is necessary is a continual struggle to make this world a better place. It will not be easy and it will not be simple. It has its ups and downs. Jerusalem was destroyed, but it can be rebuilt and it is now being rebuilt. Jewish worship tells us that G-d will help us if we will help Him by trying to live good and moral lives. We are not supposed to ascend to heaven when we pray. We are supposed to open our hearts so G-d can enter, so He can give us the strength to help Him make this a better world. Peace of mind is not for this world. Meaningful moral creativity is. *no, he's not*

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This Shabbos we read the two portions of Mattos/Massey. In it we learned about the difficulty of dealing with people, of dealing with each other. We learn that it is not just simple to list a list of rules and say everybody must abide by them, because there are always exceptions. We started the Torah portion by learning about vows. Judaism discourages vows because we are not always in the position of being able to keep our vows. Many times conditions arise which make it impossible to keep our vows. There is a procedure which we can go through to free ourselves of our vows, but it is a very unsatisfactory situation. In life things are not always so simple. When we deal with people we have to know what is really troubling them, what the problem is. We do not just act on intellect. Many times we know exactly what is right or wrong, but we still do the wrong thing anyway. We all know that smoking leads to cancer but very few people have quit smoking. When we deal with each other we have to deal with each other on an emotional as well as an intellectual level. We have to continue living with each other. In the Torah portion, Mattos, when we learn about the war that Moshe waged against the Midianites we learn that he waged it as G-d had commanded which means that when he besieged the cities he had to leave one side open so that those who wanted to could flee. Those who chose to fight were dealt with very harshly, but those who wanted to flee could do so. Moshe is a symbol of Din, of rules and regulations. He is a symbol of the intellect. When the Jewish people came back from the war and had not followed all his rules correctly he became very angry. Right afterwards we learn because he became angry G-d's spirit left him and it says Elazer, the Kohen, said to the men of the army, "This is the Chukas of the Torah". A Chok in Judaism means something that cannot be changed. It is just arbitrary. Elazer then proceeds to say that non-kosher vessels that were used on the fire must be cleansed by the fire. Others can be cleansed by water. The Rabbis believe this has a larger meaning. Those who have gone through an emotional experience can only be cured through an emotional experience. Those who have had an intellectual experience can be cured by an intellectual experience. Unfortunately, many of us get these levels mixed up. People who have had emotional experiences cannot be set right just by a torrent of words. They must be given warmth and kindness, comfort, etc. We exist on both

intellectual and emotional levels. There are many people who have keen intellects but emotionally they cannot handle their problems at all. That's why rules alone cannot control anything. We Jews are known as a people of law. We have Din. We also have Chesed. You cannot have one without the other. We realize that there are always extenuating circumstances. Rules have to bend whether it is dues evaluation, community, etc. It is like the story my brother tells me about a man in Israel who got in trouble with the police. He said, "I understand I am entitled to one phone call". The jailor said, "Yes, that's right". He said, "But, I have to call my mother and my wife and my lawyer and my sister-in-law.....". The jailor said, "O.K., but no more than ten". You can just imagine that in America. We need rules, though, to avoid anarchy and chaos. On the other hand, rules alone just will not work. People suffer and have emotional problems and it takes more than just explaining rules to get them back in shape. In the Torah portion, Massey, we learn about Aaron's death. We are given the exact date of his death, the first of Av. His yehrzeit will be this Tuesday night and Wednesday. We are not given the date of anybody else's death in the Torah, only Aaron's. Aaron was a symbol of peace and understanding. He could deal with people on an emotional level. He knew how to bring them back when they did bad things. When he died the whole people mourned. When Moshe died only the elite, a few of his students, mourned. After all, only a few people have I.Q.s of 180, but everybody has emotional needs. Aaron died on the first of Av. On the 9th of Av terrible things happened to our people. I do not think that it is a coincidence that the Torah mentions his death on the first of Av. We are to learn that without understanding we will destroy people not save or help them. The Talmud says we are to push away with the left hand and draw close with the right hand. It is not enough to just say someone broke a fule and I am going to cut him off completely. It just does not work. We also learn in the Torah portion, Massey, that if someone killed someone accidentally but with contributory negligence he had to go to a city of refuge and there he had to live until the Kohen Godol died. The Gemora says that the mother of the High Priest used to bring food for these really imprisoned men so that they should not pray for the death of her son. The Rabbis all ask, "Well, what if they should pray

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for the death of the Kohen Godol? Would that make any difference? Is G-d going to listen to the prayers of violent men to kill a good man?" The answer, obviously, is no. There are many reasons given but the one I think is the best is that even though these people were being punished according to the law kindness and consideration should be given to them even though the mother of the Kohen Godol knew they were probably praying for his death. We need both Din and Chesed. We need both Moshe and Aaron. Many times people do crazy things and with a little understanding we can bring them back to the right path. There is a cute story I heard the other day. A man came into a psychiatrist's office. He was dressed like Napoleon. The psychiatrist asked him who was he. He said, "Napoleon". The psychiatrist asked him what was wrong with him. He said, "Nothing, I am here because of my wife, Josephine". The doctor said, "What's wrong with Josephine?" The man answered, "Well, she runs around the house all day claiming she is Sadie Rabinowitz". Let us use both Din and Chesed in our dealings with people.



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In the Torah portion Massey we learn about the various stops that the Jewish people made on their journey to the Land of Israel. We learn that their journey has its ups and downs. There were some places which were bitter and other places in which they made great progress. It says, "And Moshe wrote their going outs according to their journeys according to the Word of G-d," and then it says, "These are their journeys according to their going outs." Why did the Torah have to mention their going outs according to their journeys twice, and why, the second time, didn't the Torah put their journeys according to their going outs? One was according to the Word of G-d, and the second time it does not say it was according to G-d. Why, too, did the Torah list all these stops? The Torah, which is usually so terse with language, why did it say they traveled from Miska and they camped in Chashmona, and then they traveled from Chashmona and camped in Moseirus? Why should the Torah mention all this? It seems to me that here we have something very important which is being missed by modern man. There is a great deal of unhappiness today and a lot of unhappiness is caused because people do not realize what life is all about. Life is a journey. Life is never static. Things are always in flux, constantly changing. We can never rest in this life. We never can achieve a certain plateau and then everything will be hunky dory. We just do not get married and live happily ever after. We can get married and live happily ever after, but it takes a lot of work. Life's changes are constantly bombarding us. In America today we feel that if we do one certain thing we will get instant happiness. If a person will only lose 30 pounds he will be assured the good and wonderful life. If a person will jog every day everything will turn out perfect. If a person will use this beauty cream he or she will have instant happiness. It never works. People conceive of life as a war. We will win the battle and then have peace of mind. There is no such thing. Jacob thought that he would go back to the Land of Canaan, that Jacob will sit, everything will be okay, you have to wait for Laban, he made peace with Esau, but things were not all right. He then had the terrible problems with Joseph and the rest of his sons, slavery, etc. In life we are constantly being buffeted by problems and challenges and changes. That's why immediately after we learn about how

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the people came to the Land of Canaan, we learn that they were commanded to destroy all the idols in the Land of Canaan. Idols are static. They do not grow. They do not change. This was what was wrong with the golden calf. Gold does not rust or change. It stays the same. In life we have to recognize that there must be constant changes, and we have to grow with them. We have to mold these changes so that they will lead us to a goal of a moral and just society and allow us to become a better person. There are two ways a person can handle change. One is to start with the going out and to look toward the goals. He can take change and try to mold it and shape it so he will become a better person and society will become better. Other people start the opposite way. Their goals are determined by their going out, by what they are now. All they want to do is to protect what they have. They want to stop change. They usually are never successful because change cannot be stopped. They end up doing hateful things because they resent the march of time: mothers who do not want their children to grow up, people who are still being controlled and manipulated by parents and grandparents who are long gone. We can handle change by molding and shaping it the right way always maintaining the right values or we can try to just maintain what we have trying to keep all change away and end up being hateful and spiteful people. Each of us must grow and our society must grow. We can never be satisfied with being what we are otherwise we will retrogress, not progress. This is the meaning of the story a Chassidic rabbi used to tell about a king who went into a rebellious province. A sharpshooter took aim at him, but a soldier next to him pulled up the king's horse and saved him. The king asked the soldier, "What can I do for you?" The soldier answered, "I have a mean sergeant. Please remove him." The king said he would but he looked at the soldier and said, "Why didn't you ask to be a sergeant or lieutenant or captain?" That's the trouble with many people. They do not look to mold and shape events of the future, to make things better for everyone and themselves. They are only looking to guard their own little bailiwick. That's like the story I heard that when Noah's ark rested and he and his family left with all the animals, Noah's wife said, "Noah, this ark is a blight on the landscape. It looks terrible. It's cluttering up the whole atmosphere."

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Noah answered, "Dont' worry, I left two termites there." Unfortunately, that's the problem with many people. Instead of taking an ark which is now useless and using its boards to make beautiful buildings or in order to construct a factory, all they can think about is getting rid of it. What G-d wants us to do is to let us use change to make life better and to grow both our society and ourselves.

MASSEY

# Education, Automatic Responses to Thinking

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There are two different types of education. There is a type of education which teaches us a skill, and a type of education which teaches us to think. These two types of education are almost always mutually exclusive. They cannot be <sup>taught</sup> ~~given~~ at the same time in the same course. When we learn a skill, we must learn the skill so well that the skill becomes second nature to us. We do not want to think about how we should perform this skill when we are performing it. If we think about what we are doing when we are doing a particular skill, we will not be able to do it well. When a person types his fingers should go automatically to the different letters. <sup>to type,</sup> He should not consciously have to think where to put the index finger or little finger, etc. ~~in order to type.~~

The purpose of this first type of education is to teach us to perform skills automatically without any type of awareness or self-consciousness. When we are driving a car and see a red light, we should automatically put our foot on the brake without even thinking about it. This type of education's purpose is, so to speak, to put a computer program in our brain entitled "Driving a Car," "Typing," "Arithmetic," etc. Any time we want to call on these skills we, so to speak, push a button and they work themselves.

The other type of education is meant to teach us how to think. In this type of education, we do not want things to be automatic. We are taught to examine everything critically, even the things we have taken for granted since childhood. One of the marks of a creative person is that he is able to immediately spot the things that we do automatically, question them, and then propose alternative solutions.

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Most of the time, creative people's ideas are not accepted immediately because the people around them have been taught to look at the problems the creative man is dealing with in an automatic way. They have to, so to speak, turn off their programs before they can appreciate what the creative person has created.

Both these types of education are crucial in a society. We need them both. We need to learn how to automatically respond. This helps in communications. Everybody then knows what certain things mean. That's the reason many firms today only want to hire college graduates. Most of the time these firms place college graduates in jobs that have nothing at all to do with their majors in university, but the reason they want to hire college graduates is because all college graduates generally react automatically <sup>the</sup> ~~to~~ same to any given situation. They can communicate easily. It is essential when people work together that they know what each other means. <sup>the</sup> otherwise the office or factory will degenerate into a group of bickering people.

That's, too, why ~~when~~ <sup>who</sup> people come from other cultures ~~they~~ have a hard time in America. In America the things we do automatically many times have a different meaning in another culture, and certain things done in other cultures automatically give off wrong signals here in America. For example, in Arab countries it is considered a sign of friendship, and only friendship, for men to walk down the street holding hands. In America, of course, this would have an entirely different meaning.

Most education in America today is really geared to teaching skills.

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We fool ourselves when we say that we want our students to always think. We really do not. We want them to think out all their responses in our training sessions to all sorts of situations so that they will respond automatically when confronted with these situations in real life. We use thinking only as a means to obtain automatic responses. We teach soldiers how to react to certain situations so that when they are on the battlefield they will not have to think about how to react. They will just know. The same goes for policemen, even teacher and doctors and nurses, etc. Much of their education is geared to know what to do when different situations arise. Of course, there is much thought given to what to do before the automatic response is agreed upon, but, basically, most education is to teach us how to automatically respond to different situations. Society needs this kind of education, and it is important.

In only one area do we fail to give this type of education, and that is in the area of morality, in the area of teaching character. When it comes to skills, whether it be computer operators, pilots, surgeons, etc., we do not want them to think out a problem when they encounter it. We want them to know already what to do when the situation arises without having to think everything through. This is the difference between an experimental procedure and a routine procedure. In a routine procedure the problems have already been all worked out and, depending on the situation, the person with these skills proceeds automatically.

This is also what we mean by an experienced person. When he comes across a situation he does not panic. Instinctively he knows how

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to act because he has confronted it before. When it comes to morals, ethics, we should be teaching the same type of automatic responses. It should be second nature to people to know what to do and say when they see a person who is suffering, what to do and say at a funeral, what to do and say for a needy bride, how to respond to children's needs, parent's needs, etc. In our day and age we have stopped teaching these automatic moral skills. In fact, in a study made in a Midwestern state, it was found that children, by and large, no longer have a firm sense of right and wrong. It is not automatic anymore that if a child finds a wallet with money <sup>in it</sup> that he will return it. It is not automatic that children think shoplifting is wrong. It is not automatic that if a child sees a person collapse on the street that he will help or try to summon help.

In the moral sphere there are also two types of education. Teaching moral skills is one of them and, for some reason, teaching these moral skills is greatly neglected in our society. Teaching people how to think about moral issues is the other type. This type of teaching, however, has a danger. Not every new way of thinking about morality is better, not all new ways lead to positive results; for example, drugs, licentiousness, etc.

In Judaism, too, we recognize that there are two different types of education. There is <sup>a type of</sup> ~~an~~ education which teaches the automatic moral ~~responses~~ and ritual responses of a Jew. We learn how to put on Tephillin, how to say our prayers, how to keep kosher, how to keep Shabbos, how to give charity, how to belong to synagogues, how to form Free Loan societies, etc. Every Jew must learn these automatic

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responses. Every Jew, when he is confronted with a suffering individual, must <sup>know</sup> ~~always~~ automatically <sup>how to</sup> respond to the need. That's one of the main purposes of Jewish education. Our traditional Jewish schools in America have mainly geared their curriculum to teach these automatic Jewish responses. This was and is important and necessary, and those groups in Judaism who stopped teaching automatic <sup>Jewish moral & religious</sup> ~~Jewish~~ responses ~~in morality and religious areas~~ <sup>have</sup> found that their children could not relate to things Jewish, and <sup>want to</sup> ~~the tide of~~ assimilation <sup>is</sup> ~~rose precipitously~~ among them ~~because these children did not know how to respond as~~ Jews to life's religious and moral problems.

This, however, was and is only one aspect of the traditional Jewish education. The other aspect is to teach us how to think <sup>Jewishly</sup>. This ability to think Jewishly not only expands our Jewishness but allows us to become more spiritual human beings. Judaism, then, just does not become a bunch of surface customs, automatic responses to given situations. In America, especially, where Jewish automatic responses are questioned by the prevailing culture, sometimes even laughed at and derided, we cannot count on the fact that our children will maintain these automatic responses. They need, in addition, a spiritual sensitivity.

There are many different levels of learning, and unless a person is acquainted with many different levels he will not appreciate what he has. An automobile mechanic does not really have to know physics or chemistry in order to fix a car. He just has to know where the alternator goes, where the spark plugs go, etc., if you hear one noise it is this problem, another noise it is another problem, etc. However, if an automobile mechanic does know physics and chemistry,



he will appreciate what he is doing much more and may be able to design a totally new kind of car which may run better and be more efficient.

Jewish life demands creative responses. It is not just enough to teach automatic responses. We must teach the underlying principles, presuppositions, religious perspectives, and underlying reasons if our children are to have the necessary depth to continue on the Jewish journey through human history. They need to spiritually grow, too. That's why the study of the Talmud is so important. The Talmud very rarely comes to a decision. It mainly discusses problems from all different angles. It does not assure automatic responses. The purpose of Talmudic study is not to teach us how to act in given situations. That is reserved for studying the Shulchan Orech. The Talmud, instead, <sup>is</sup> meant to allow us to examine problems from all angles so that we learn how to think, so that we learn to make Judaism a creative force within ourselves.

In the Torah portion, Massey, we learn about the various journeys that the Jewish people traveled when they wandered in the desert for forty years. We learn how it says, "And Moshe wrote their going forths according to their journeys according to the word of G-d, and these are their journeys according to their going forths." The rabbis ask the question, why does it have to repeat "their going forths according to their journeys?" It only mentions "according to the word of G-d" next to their journeys, and then it repeats and it says, "These are their journeys according to their going forths." The word "Motzoh - going forths" in Hebrew means also "a remedy,

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~~a way out~~, or edict." It stands for the automatic responses of man.

In our spiritual journey through life we need to have automatic responses.

We need to have an education which conditions us to always heed the cry of the oppressed, the hungry, and the needy.

We also need "Masaihem - their journeys." Here it says "their journeys according to the word of G-d." The word "journey" also means "a departure, ~~a took~~, a removal." This stands for the type of learning which allows us to look at things new and fresh but always according to the word of G-d. We are never to rethink our propositions and view of the world without the presence of morality or G-d. Those types of rethinking, those types of creativity that leave out G-d and morality lead to retrogression and decadence, not to progress.

The sentence then repeats, "And these are their journeys according to their going forths." We need to stress the ability to think in order to be spiritually sensitive, although the final item is to learn how to automatically respond as a moral human being. In life's journey we must know how to think in spiritual terms and respond morally.

In this Torah portion we also learn how a person who accidentally killed another and who had been contributorily negligent was confined to a city of refuge. He <sup>did</sup> ~~had~~ not <sup>have</sup> ~~had~~ the proper automatic responses, otherwise he would not have been contributorily negligent. The rabbis also say he did not have a correct spiritual understanding. He did not learn how to think Jewishly, ~~because otherwise~~ <sup>otherwise</sup> he would not have

put himself in a position where this terrible event could have happened at all. He had to stay in the city of refuge until the Kohen Godol died. The rabbis say, why this unusual punishment? They reply, because this would cause the accidental murderer to be interested in the Kohen Godol and his activities. This would cause him to learn what the Kohen Godol stood for, and what the Kohen Godol's activities were. He would then learn how to act as a Jew and think as a Jew.

The rabbis tell us that the Temple was destroyed because <sup>people</sup> ~~scholars~~ did not treat <sup>Scholars</sup> ~~each other~~ with respect, and because there was senseless hatred between Jews. There were some Jews who thought Jewishly but did not act Jewishly, and some Jews who acted Jewishly but did not think Jewishly. Tisha B'Av teaches us that we must both act and think Jewishly if the Temple is to be rebuilt. May all of us always deepen both aspects of our Jewish education. May we learn to think in Jewish spiritual terms and always respond automatically in Jewish moral terms. ~~May our so doing cause us to always act and think Jewishly~~ and, thus, warrant the rebuilding of the Temple.

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In the Torah portion Mattos Massey we learn about the journeys that the Jewish people took from Egypt until they arrived in the land of Israel. The question is often asked why does the Torah spend so much time telling us about these journeys, the Torah which is usually so terse in its language, spent an enormous amount of space on these journeys. Most of the places we cannot even identify today. Why should the Torah have done this? It seems to me that the Torah here is teaching us something very important about life, and that is that life has its ups and downs, successes and failures, but this should not deter us from our goals. Many of the places described here were places where bad things happened to the Jewish people, places in which the Jewish people sinned. Life is more like a baseball game than a football game. In baseball a winning team will lose 62 games. A team can win the pennant usually if it wins 100 games and loses 62. A good hitter bats safely only one out of three times. This is similar to life. In life we should never be discouraged because we do not immediately reach our goals. We are going to strike out a lot. A good football team wins all of its games or only loses one or two. Life, though, is not like a football game. It is like a baseball game. We should never be upset because we strike out or fail. We should just start again. Eventually, we will reach our goal. We should never give up.

Numbers/Bamidbar

MATTOS 1987

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The Torah portion Mattos opens by telling us different rules and regulations about vows. It starts out by saying, "And Moses spoke unto the heads of the tribes of Israel saying..." This is very unusual. Usually a Torah portion will begin or a command will begin, "And Moshe spoke to the sons of Israel." Here it mentions the heads of the tribes of Israel. The rabbis explain that here when they were speaking about vows and promises it was essential that Moshe address this particularly to the heads of the tribes of Israel, because many times the heads of people make promises to their people which they know they cannot keep. Therefore, they have be warned, especially, that when they make promises they should try as much as possible to keep these promises. We see here in America that many times politicians makes promises that they cannot keep, but they make them in order to get elected. Of course, some people can argue that it is better that they make these promises so they can get elected and do the right thing than not make the promises and not get elected. However, it destroys confidence <sup>of</sup> ~~of~~ the people in their leaders and eventually it turns out to be destructive instead of constructive.

In fact, one of the themes of the Torah portions Mattos and Massey is the whole problem of fulfilling expectations. Many times we do what we think the person wants us to do and then we are rebuffed. We are pushed away. We do not understand what happened. Here we did what we thought we were asked to do and instead of being rewarded we are castigated or rebuffed or our efforts are made light of. How many times has it happened that someone fulfilled a job for his boss and the boss looked at the job after it was done and said, "Oh, this is not what I wanted." Or, how many times has a spouse cooked a meal for the other spouse and the spouse said, "Oh, this

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tastes terrible," when actually that is what the spouse is telling the other spouse wanted. You are we to tell when we have done what we have pleased the person to whom we have committed so much error? How do we know what the person really means when he says he would like certain things done? How would we interpret this? We know that many times people do not say exactly what they mean, and you have to read them. You have to be able to figure out what they really mean.

Of course, many times we can do exactly what a person wants us to do, but, yet, because the thing, itself, is distasteful and we are only called upon to do it because of the reality of the situation, yet we are held in disrepute if we do it. For example, if we were called upon to be the hangman for the state we would be fulfilling the requests of superiors, but, of course, people would not look at us favorably. We will have done our job, but, yet, there is still a taint on us. The same thing happened in the Torah portion to the army which the Jewish people had sent against Midian. They had completed their job. Moshe, however, when they came back, rebuked them because they had not punished the perpetrators of the crime of sexual, licentious immorality which had been sprung upon the Jewish people by the Midianites. Notice that the Jewish people had not punished the Moabites at all even though they were in league with the Midianites, because the Moabites were afraid. They had reason to fear the Jewish people. The Jewish people were confronting them right on the borders of their own land. The Midians lived in Saudi Arabia or Sinai and nothing to fear from the Jewish people. Why, then, did they interfere? They offered their daughters and wives in sexual, licentious acts in order to lure the Jewish people away from the worship of G-d and to destroy their own morale. Moshe, of course, ordered that the perpetrators, themselves, be punished, but even after the

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people, with his will they still had to go through a purification process, even though they had done what they were supposed to have done, yet war taints a person. The realities of the situation did not call for a reward. They call for, perhaps, a commendation of sorts but not full wholehearted acceptance of the deeds that were done.

This, of course, is the same thing that happened with King David. King David wanted to build the Temple, but G-d would not let him build the Temple because his hands were filled with blood. Of course, you can claim, how was that David's fault? He was fighting defensive wars. These wars were thrust upon him. He had no choice. He had to defeat the enemies of the Jewish people, otherwise the Jewish people would be destroyed. Yet, we do not revel in war. We do not consider it the way a person becomes a mensch, a man, is to prove his valor in war. That may be other cultures, but it is not ours. We regret having to fight wars, and when we do fight wars we realize it somehow taints our soul. It somehow diminishes us. We do not really want to be involved in these things. If the reality forces it upon us, then we must act, but it is not something we should expect to get a big reward for.

This is the same problem of fulfilling someone's expectations, of expecting to be rewarded for what you thought were a person's words, is continued in this sedra where we learn how Moshe becomes very angry at the tribes of Reuven and Gad because they come before him saying they do not want to make Aliyah to the land of Israel but want to stay in the Galut, in TransJordan, because they have a lot of cattle. Moshe immediately castigates them because he feels they are being cowardly. They want to dissuade the rest of the Jewish people from entering the land of Israel, but Reuven and Gad say no.

They went to go armed in front of the people and want to help and people conquer the land. Only then will they take their inheritance in the land. Moshe had misunderstood them, and they felt that they could fulfill his requirements. Moshe said if that was the case it was okay, but he still frowned upon them because when they said they would go armed before the Jewish people they said they would build pens for their sheep and cattle and then cities for their children. Moshe knew they thought more of their sheep and cattle than their children. Unfortunately, this is even true in America today where people think more of their material goods than their children. Some people do not even have children so they can have more material goods. It is a bad situation. Here Moshe really did not misunderstand the people too much. The request they had made was faulty because they did it from the basis of wealth and not on the basis of what was best for their families. They expected Moshe to laud them because they were willing to go armed before the Jewish people. That was true. They deserved a certain amount of praise, but their conditions were also flawed because they put their wealth before their children.

This same lesson we learn throughout, that many times you have to understand what a person's motives are when he makes a request of you. Many times the request that they make of you is not what you think it is. I know it once happened that a person came to me very much upset because of a newspaper article I had written. He said there was no picture with the article, that the article was much too long, not enough people were quoted, etc. Immediately I wrote another article and this time he came to me praising me about how great the article was. The article still had no picture, it was still the same length, but this time I put his name in it. Then he was happy. Actually, the request was not to fulfill the things he mentioned. You had to understand what he really wanted.



Rabbi Joseph Nechama

It also happens many times, that we fulfill the request but fulfill it in an unlawful way. For example, I had a child who did not complete his homework. The child beamed and bowed as the day of reckoning was approaching, the final day for handing in homework. I told him, "You have to hand in that homework tomorrow or you will get an F." He promptly went home and handed in the homework the next day. Of course, I was not pleased because he had copied someone else's homework. He had not done it himself. Here he thought he was fulfilling my request, but he did it in an illegal way. Perhaps this is the same thing that happened to the President of the United States when he made a request to his NSC staff, and they thought they were fulfilling his request even though they used lying and deception and illegal means. This is not the way to fulfill a request either.

This same theme is found throughout the Torah portion Massey as well although they give one more example, and that is that if a person is involved in a homicide and had contributed in negligence, that person had to live in a city of refuge until the high priest died. The rabbis ask, what does the high priest have to do with this person contributing negligence in a homicide? They answer that this person, by the lax manner in which he lived, caused another person's death. If he would now have to learn all about the Kohen Gadol and what the Kohen Gadol stands for, therefore, he would change his personality. The request was not that the Kohen Gadol should die. That was not why we have this person wait until the Kohen Gadol dies, but the purpose is that he should learn everything about the Kohen Gadol and his life style so that will influence him. The rabbis even go so far as to say that the mother of the high priest used to bring dainties and gifts and presents to these people in cities of refuge, and some people say the reason she did it was so that these people would not pray for the Kohen.

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Godol to die. Obviously, why should G-d listen to the prayers of these people who were violent people, who killed somebody, not on purpose but they killed somebody because they were lax in their behavior, and a righteous man like the Kohen Godol should die because of their prayers? Obviously, this is not what it means. It means that these people would look at the values of the high priest. They would look to see that the mother was still interested in them, that they were still human beings, that they have many values to learn so that the request here would not be that they should pray for the death of the high priest but that they should pray to acquire his values so that that when they were let out of the cities of refuge they would act in a more proper manner and never get involved in homicides again.

This, then, is one of the lessons of these two Torah portions, and that is that we should not be disappointed many times when, after we thought we fulfilled the request of another person or even constituted authorities, that we are not rewarded and given a big pat on the back. Sometimes it could be because the very nature of the job we are called upon to do, and even though we do it faithfully, besmirches us. We do not want to glorify war. We do not want to glorify violence. We have to realize that when we take upon such a task we will not be rewarded adequately or the way we think we will be rewarded. Secondly, many times we misunderstand what a person says. We do not fulfill his request completely, like the tribes of Gad and Reuven who thought they were fulfilling Moshe's request when they said they would go armed, but then they put their material goods ahead of their children. Also, many times we would think that because we are given a request to do something we can do it even if we are going to break the law, even if we are going to use illegal means. If we use illegal means, even if we fulfill the person's request, we are again not deserving of any praise or reward.

Yaacov Joseph Rabinov

I am reminded of the story they tell of a man who went into a bar and gathered all the people around him and said, "Bartender, when I drink everyone drinks," so the bartender gave drinks to everyone. The man then said, "When I have a second drink everybody has a second drink," so the bartender gave everyone a second drink. The man then took out two dollars and laid them on the bar and said, "When I pay everybody pays." The people, of course, misinterpreted what he was doing. They thought he was going to buy them drinks, but he was not. Many times when we hear the requests of people we have to be careful how we fulfill them. We have to be careful that we fulfill them in a correct and honest and honorable way. We have to also realize that sometimes the task, itself, will prevent us from getting a reward, and sometimes, too, we have to be careful that we understand completely what the person is requesting of us otherwise we may give him or her the wrong thing. Also, if a person ever asks us to do anything illegal, then we should realize that that person's request is invalid and maybe we do not need any type of relationships with them. Let us hope and pray that we will all fulfill the requests of the Holy One, Blessed be He, correctly, legally, and with sensitivity so that the Mashiaoh will come.

MATOS-MASSAY 1996  
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today we read a double Torah portion, Matos and Masay. One of the underlying themes of the Torah portion Matos is words, is how we express ourselves, is the importance to keep our word but, more important than that, it is how and why we express ourselves, what we do when we express ourselves. This Torah portion starts out with the words, "And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes and the sons of Israel saying, 'This is the word which G-d spoke'." Usually the expression Zeh Hadovor is not used. Usually the expression is Ko Amar Adoshem, thus said G-d. Amar means to just relate facts, to relate incidents, to relate visions, as later prophets did. When you use the word Dovor, though, it becomes a stronger word, from Deebair, which means that you are also conveying words which have emotional import. You are not just being an objective reporter who is setting down facts. What you are doing is trying to elicit an emotional response in your listeners. We have to be very careful with words because words can harm tremendously. The phrase, sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me, is one of the biggest lies that was ever written. Words count. More wars were probably started because of words than anything else. Family relationships have deteriorated because of words. Nasty comments hurt. In fact, there is a famous Yiddish expression which says that a potch you will forget but a bad word you will remember forever. That, of course, has been borne out by many psychological and sociological studies. They say that it takes twenty acts of kindness to equate one nasty comment. One nasty comment can wipe out twenty acts of kindness. This is especially true in marriage relationships and interpersonal relationships of all kinds. I have met many people who do many, many wonderful things and they really go out of the way to help people but they are disliked terribly. The reason they are disliked terribly is that they always ruin what

