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**What Are the Three Weeks?**



 The Three Weeks is an annual mourning period that falls out in the summer. This is when we mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple and our launch into a still-ongoing exile.

 The period begins on the [17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/144573/jewish/The-Three-Weeks.htm), a fast day that marks the day when the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans in 69 CE.

 It reaches its climax and concludes with the fast of the [9th of Av](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/144575/jewish/What-Is-Tisha-BAv.htm), the date when both Holy Temples were set aflame. This is the saddest day of the Jewish calendar, and it is also the date that [many other tragedies](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/946703/jewish/What-Happened-on-the-Ninth-of-Av.htm) befell our people.

**Observances:**

 There are [various mourning-related customs](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/144573/jewish/The-Three-Weeks.htm) and observances that are followed for the entire three-week period (until midday of the 10th of the Hebrew month of Av, or—if that date falls on Friday—the morning of that day). We do not cut our hair, purchase new clothes, or listen to music. No weddings are held.

 **17 Tammuz** is a fast day, on which we refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to nightfall.

The final [**Nine Days**](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/144574/jewish/The-Nine-Days.htm) of the Three Weeks are a time of intensified mourning. Starting on the first of Av, we refrain from eating meat or drinking wine, and from wearing freshly laundered clothes.

 **9 Av** is a more stringent fast than 17 Tammuz. It begins at sunset of the previous evening, when we gather in the synagogue to read the Book of Lamentations. Besides fasting, we abstain from additional pleasures: washing, applying lotions or creams, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations. Until midday, we sit on the floor or on low stools.

 There is more to the Three Weeks than fasting and lamentation. Our sages tell us that those who mourn the destruction of Jerusalem will merit seeing it rebuilt with the coming of Moshiach. May that day come soon, and then all the mournful dates on the calendar will be transformed into days of tremendous joy and happiness.

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**Implosion**

**By Rabbi Berel Wein**

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 Even a cursory review of world history allows the reader to realize that great and mighty countries and empires fall not necessarily because of outside pressures, but because of the implosion of the society itself. Rome ruled the world for over five centuries, and, at the height of its power, it succumbed to barbaric tribes. The breakup and disintegration of the Empire came as Rome was undermined by the spread of Christianity within its society and the dissatisfaction and dissolution of social norms.

 These factors gave way to internal violence and a complete abandonment of any sense of loyalty to the Empire itself, or to the history that Rome had so carefully fashioned and preserved over its centuries of hegemony. In short, Rome collapsed from within and not from without.

**Self-Destruction of the Spanish Empire**

 The same can be said of the Spanish Empire in the 16th century, which never recovered from its foolish, and self-destructive exile of its Jewish population at the beginning of the century. It no longer possessed the creativity and will to succeed that had driven it to become one of the major powers in the world.

 The Ottoman Empire was also rotten from the inside, and any stress placed upon it would hasten its extinction and disappearance. The First World War provided that stress. and the Ottoman Turkish Empire never recovered. In our time, we have witnessed the destruction of Communism within the Soviet Union after 75 years of brutal and tyrannical rule. Once again, the Soviet Union collapsed from the inside and not from the outside. It had weathered all of the storms of World War II and the Cold War, but it could not survive because of the malaise of its population, the burdens of bureaucracy and inefficient government that it had foisted upon a helpless populace.

**A Serious Question Regarding the**

**Future of the United States of America**

 A serious question has now arisen regarding the future of the United States of America. It is a very polarized society, and over the past decades it has lost its moral footing. It has become dissolute, hateful of its own heritage, spoiled by too much material wealth, and subject to Marxist indoctrination emanating from its educational systems.

 Whether or not the United States will be able to survive this storm is, as of yet, an undecided question. However, it is clear to me that no matter what happens, it will become increasingly difficult for Orthodox Jews to maintain themselves in American society. The entire culture is hostile to Torah values and to a Jewish way of life.

 Jews have waxed prosperous over the past decades, and the continuity of Orthodox educational institutions is contingent upon the continuation of that prosperity. However, whether America will have a prosperous future over the next few decades is a difficult question to answer. There will be more governmental regulations regarding curriculum, and the nature of educational classes in schools. Education separated by sex will certainly not be allowed, and the concentration on Torah studies will be severely limited. I hope that I am wrong regarding my fears, but my heart tells me otherwise.

**The America I Knew No Longer Exists**

 Certainly, the America that I grew up in and lived in for most of my lifetime no longer exists. There is no longer wholesome entertainment nor a feeling of moral probity. America was once a religious country. Today it has become overwhelmingly secular with all the attendant evils that such a change in society inevitably engenders. History teaches us that nothing goes on forever, and that great countries and empires rise but inevitably fall.

 For many years, I thought that the United States was an exception to that rule, but I no longer believe so. The curve has already flattened, and we are witness to the downward spiral that leads to irrelevance and impotence in world events, I fervently pray that I am wrong but these are my impressions as I view the current scene.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Parshas Mas’ei**

**What Can You Do to**

**Make HASHEM Angry**

By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier

Founder of TheSmuz.com

“*These are the journeys of the Children of Yisrael, who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions, under the hand of Moshe and Aharon.*” — Bemidbar 33:1

 The parshah begins with a catalog of the forty-two stops that the Jewish nation made in the desert. Rashi explains this with a mashal. Imagine a king whose son was critically ill. In search of a cure, he travelled with his child to a faraway land.

 The journey was successful, and on their way back home, the king pointed out to his son each of the stops they had made along the way. With great joy, he said, “This is where your fever peaked. This was the place where we rested…” So, too, HASHEM recounted with great delight the various stops in the Jewish people’s travels.

**The Problem**

 This Rashi is very difficult to understand. These “stops along the way” weren’t part of the plan. In fact, they were quite the opposite.

 The Jewish nation left Mitzrayim amidst great fanfare and glory. With the entire world taking note, they were to make one stop at Har Sinai to receive the Torah and then move on toward the Holy Land to occupy it forever.



**Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

 That wasn’t, however, the way things turned out. Because of their sins, the entire generation was decreed to wander from place to place for forty years and then to die in the desert. And even then the lesson wasn’t learned. Time after time, they failed; time after time they sinned. HASHEM’s description of this period was, “For forty years you tested Me…” How then can Rashi say that these stops were joyfully recounted by HASHEM?

 The answer to this can best be understood by asking a somewhat irreverent question.

**What can you do to make HASHEM angry?**

 Let’s say that you decided, “That’s it. I’ve had it. I’m fed up with Hashem! I’m going to do something to get Him angry.” What could you do to make Hashem really mad? The answer is nothing.

 Because we are physical beings, by definition we are confined. We exist for a given amount of time. We take up a given amount of space. We can run just so fast, walk just so far. Hashem, on the other hand, is beyond all boundaries and beyond all confines.

 Hashem is in all places at all times, existing before and after time. Hashem is so above all of nature that there is nothing that is beyond His powers and nothing that He can’t do. Hashem said, “It should be,” and everything — energy, matter, quarks, atoms, and molecules — came into being. Hashem is also the Maintainer of physicality. Nothing can exist without Him constantly infusing energy into it.

 The reason I get angry is because I’m frustrated by my lack of power and control. But nothing is beyond Hashem; nothing is out of His control. Therefore, anger doesn’t apply to Him.

 When Hashem gave free will to man, He gave us the ability to make choices — but He governs the outcome.

 If man chooses evil, there are times when Hashem will allow those actions to come to fruition. But at no point, is Hashem not in control. The very notion of Hashem being angry stems from a lack of comprehending His greatness.

**HASHEM acts with anger for our benefit**

 This seems to be the answer to the question on Rashi. HASHEM wasn’t “angry” with the generation. HASHEM took corrective actions to help them realize their mistakes. Once the end came about and the Jewish nation was ready to enter the Holy Land, HASHEM looked back over the stops with great fondness, as each one was part of the healing process.

 This concept is essential for us in understanding our relationship with HASHEM. During our lives, there will be many times when we experience pain, suffering, and setbacks. However, not only doesn’t HASHEM save us from these situations, often, we see the hand of HASHEM bringing them about. From our mortal, limited perspective we tend to experience this as “HASHEM is annoyed with us — vengefully punishing us for our transgressions.”

 It is then that we need to be mindful that HASHEM is never angry. HASHEM has a much broader vision than we do. Like a loving parent carefully guiding his child, HASHEM directs our lives with loving kindness, bringing about situations for our benefit. Often times we don’t see it until the end, but everything that HASHEM does is for the best and is done out of love for us, His beloved creations.

Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [*Shmuz on the Parsha book*](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).

**The Goal of Utilizing the Difficulties**

**Of this World to Prepare for the**

**G-dliness of the Messianic Era**

From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l



 The Sabbaths during the "Three Weeks" (the interval of time between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av), contain a unique dimension: They are within the period of lamentation over the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people, yet it is forbidden to mourn on Shabbat, and on the contrary, it is a great mitzva to rejoice.

 In truth, these special Sabbaths express the true good that is hidden within the exile. Seen superficially, the exile is only a negative phenomenon --- agonizing, painful and without merit.

**The Bitter Exile Contains Higher Purpose**

 On a deeper level, however, the exile contains a higher purpose, one which is only goodness and light --- the Final Redemption with Moshiach.

 In fact, in the era of Moshiach, those days that were marked by the Jewish people as days of mourning will be transformed into days of rejoicing.

 This principle -- that what we now perceive as cause for grief will ultimately be shown to be only good -- is reflected in the dual nature of these three Sabbaths.

This duality is further expressed in this week's two Torah portions, Matot and Masei.

 In the Torah, the Jewish people are sometimes referred to as "shevatim" and sometimes as "matot," both of which are generally translated as "tribes."

**An Important Distinction**

**Between “Rods” and “Staffs”**

 Literally "rods" or "staffs," there is one important distinction between the two terms: although both signify a branch that has been cut from a tree, a "shevet" still retains its moisture and suppleness, whereas a "mateh" has already dried out and is therefore stronger and inflexible.

 These two appellations allude to the Jewish soul's journey in this physical world.

 Torn from its G-dly Source above, the soul is "cut off" from its roots, as it were. Sometimes it manages to retain its original Divine "moisture," yet other times it is so estranged from its G-dly Source that it appears to have "dried out" completely.

**A Descent from the Highest Spiritual**

**Planes to this Lowly World**

 "Masei" ("Journeys") too, alludes to the soul's descent from the highest spiritual planes to this world, including the lowliest descent of all into the exile. And yet, the purpose of this descent is none other than ascent, thus the strong rod has a certain advantage over the flexible tree branch.

 Matot and Masei remind us of the true essence of the exile experience, which is the great ascent and revelation of G-dliness that will be revealed precisely from within.

 A Jew must always remember that the true purpose of the soul's sojourn in the physical world, as well as the Jewish people's travails in exile, is solely in order to reach the G-dliness of the Messianic era. This awareness in itself gives us the strength to overcome all difficulties and to fulfill G-d's will in the most trying of circumstances, leading all of Creation to its ultimate perfection with Moshiach.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Matot-Masei 5755 edition of the Lubavitch Youth Organization. Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe, Vol. 2*

**Halacha**

**Is It Permissible to**

**Buy New Clothes**

**By Rabbi Eli Mansour**

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 During The 3 Weeks or During the Last 9 Days The question was asked about buying new clothes during the period known as ‘Yime Ben HaMitzarim.’ This is the 3 weeks from Tisha Asar BeTamuz until Tisha BeAv. Is it permissible or not to buy new clothes during this time?

 Are there exceptions if it is not permissible? And if not permissible, then when does the actual restriction begin? According to Halacha, it is permissible to buy new clothes up until Rosh Chodesh Av.

 Once Rosh Chodesh Av comes upon us, it would then be forbidden to buy new clothes until after Tisha BeAv. In fact, it would be forbidden to buy new clothes even if the intent is to wear the new clothes after Tisha BeAv. And even further, it is forbidden to buy new clothes during these 9 days as a gift for another person. Bottom line, it is forbidden to buy new clothes during the nine days.

However, there are some exceptions, whereby it would be permissible to buy new attire during the nine days. First off, it is permissible to buy during the 9 days, if after the nine days the price of the garment would rise.

 For example, it is permissible to buy the clothes if there is a special sale during these days only where you have an opportunity to purchase the clothes at a discount. Secondly, it would be permissible for a person to buy a pair of non-leather shoes during the nine days in order to wear on Tisha BeAv. In fact, these new shoes can even be worn for the first time on Tisha BeAv.

 And third, according to Chacham Ben Tzion, it would be permissible during the 9 days to purchase garments which are not considered ‘Chashuv (important).’ Non-Chashuv garments can be explained as garments that are of inconsequence. For example, ladies stockings are not Chashuv, and therefore permissible Lechatchila to purchase during the nine days.

 Now, as a side note, while it is permissible to mend garments during the nine days, it would be forbidden to tailor a new suit or dress during the nine days. So taking shoes to the shoe maker, or fixing a suit is allowed, but sewing a new garment is forbidden. Similarly, it would also be forbidden to crochet, needle point, or sew any new item during the nine days as well.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinhas 5780 Parshasheet of iTorah.com*

**The Courageous Sewing Factory Manager**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**



 A story is told of a Jewish man who worked in a sewing factory in the 1930s, a time when it was very difficult for Jews to find jobs which allowed them to take off on Shabbat. Many Jews were fired every Friday after informing their boss they would not be arriving for work on Saturday.

 This man, however, was fortunate to find a job in a sewing factory that closed on Shabbat. He did his work well and was eventually promoted to a managerial position. The man was pained by the sight of fellow Jews who had no work and no money with which to support their families.



**Offering Sewing Jobs to**

**Wives of the Men in His Synagogue**

 Upon assuming the position of manager, he went around to the men in the synagogue asking if their wives knew how to sew, and inviting those who did to work in his factory.

 In just a few days, he hired five women. His boss angrily approached him and said, “What are you doing? You know we can’t afford to hire all these workers, and there isn’t enough work for them.”

 “Don’t worry,” the man said. “It will work out.”

 “If by the end of the month we don’t have enough business for these workers, then I am firing both them and you.”

 “Great,” the man thought to himself. “Now I have a few more weeks so I can continue hiring and helping more people.” He kept hiring. Towards the end of the month, the company received the largest order - by far - that it had ever received. Each and every worker which this manager hired was needed to fill the order. This proved to be the turning point for the company, and it took off and became very big. This man ended up making a lot of money.

**Many Years Later…**

 Many years later, after this man retired, he happened to meet the person from the other company who had placed that very large order. “Why did you place such a large order?” he asked. “We were such a small company at the time.”

 “The word on the street was that your factory was hiring like crazy,” the other man explained. “I figured that my competitors were all buying from you, and I wanted to keep the edge over them, so I bought even more.”

 We know, however, that the company’s success was because of this man’s mesirut nefesh. He was willing to risk his own job to help others, and so Hashem came and assisted him in ways which he could have never imagined.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Pinhas 5780 Parshasheet of iTorah.com*

**Thoughts that Count for Parshat Matot and Masei**

 Matot and Masei deal with the time when the Jewish people were about to enter the Promised Land, receiving final instructions before starting their new life.

One basic law contained in this Torah reading relates to the fundamental principal of kashrut: how to make vessels kosher, i.e., fit for use by Jews.

 According to some authorities, this passage is also the source for the Torah's laws of Family Purity.

 During these last few moments of exile we must be particularly vigilant with respect to these two commandments. For aside from their intrinsic significance as basic and perpetual principles of Judaism, they are also a special preparation and catalyst for our anticipated entry into the land of Israel with Moshiach. *(Living With Moshiach)*

 And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel saying: "This is the thing which the L-rd has commanded" (Numbers 30:2)

 Moses' intent was for the Jewish people to properly appreciate the directives of their leaders as "the word of G-d." For one must obey the ruling of our Sages just as we obey the words of the Living G-d. *(Torat Moshe)*

 We will indeed pass over armed before G-d into the land of Canaan (Numbers 32:32)

 The ascent into the land of Israel must be conducted "before G-d," that is, in order to live a life of holiness and to preserve the sanctity of the land through the observance of Torah and mitzvot. For if not for the Torah, the land of Israel would have no advantage over any other country on earth. *(Avnei Ezel)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Matot and Masei 5755 edition of L’Chaim Weekly.*

**Sports with No Spectators**

**By Rabbi Benjamin Blech**



 Greatness isn’t measured by the applause of the crowds.

 What happens when a major league baseball game is played in an empty stadium? No cheering for the home team, no screaming with delight when a favorite player smacks a gigantic home run blast over the fence, no standing ovation for a fantastic fielding play. No spectators, no feedback from the crowd, not a sound except for the clash of professional competition.

**Major League Baseball in Cavernous**

**Arenas with No Audience**

 We are about to find out in less than a month as major league baseball owners voted unanimously to attempt a 2020 shortened 60-game season which, thanks to coronavirus, will take place in cavernous arenas with no audience.

 I think this incredible setting for professional sports yields a powerful message for all of us.

 The roar of the crowd is a powerful stimulant. That’s why there is a statistically proven advantage for a team playing on its home field to adoring fans and why sports clubs make sure cheerleaders are there to inspire and to motivate. But what happens when life doesn’t supply us with an admiring audience?

 In major league baseball it only happened once before. On April 28, 2015 a game that was to be played between the Chicago White Sox and Baltimore Orioles at Camden Yards in Baltimore was canceled due to security concerns related to civil unrest in the city which caused a curfew to be in effect. The game was rescheduled for that afternoon with no fans admitted. In the first inning of that “solitude” game, the Orioles’ Chris Davis hit a monster three-run homer that wound up settling near a street exit – and the ball just sat there wondering why no one cared enough to pick it up.

**Players are Expected to**

**Do their Best Regardless**

 Players are expected to do their best whether their efforts are met with deafening cheers or deathly silence.

 But the ballplayers played and the game counted in the final league standings. The hits, runs and errors of the participants became part of their lifetime averages, just as when there were 60,000+ people in the stands. Because the players are expected to do their best whether their efforts are met with deafening cheers or deathly silence.

 Professionals are people who strive to excel no matter how many people are watching. Perhaps the best example was one of the greatest basketball games ever played. Michael Jordan said it was “the greatest game I’ve ever played in.” It took place just before the 1992 Dream Team Olympics, held in a locked Monaco gym in front of exactly nobody.

 Just four days before the start of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics the American Dream Team were about to finish their preparations when a final practice was called that would end up going down in history. Head coach Chuck Daly decided to have a tough practice session at game intensity. He organized a five-versus-five duel and to balance the opposing teams he put Michael Jordan on one and Magic Johnson on the other. The practice had nine future Hall of Famers competing. Jordan was joined by Scottie Pippen, Larry Bird, Karl Malone and Patrick Ewing. Magic Johnson was blessed with Christian Laettner, Chris Mullen, Charles Barkley and David Robinson. These are the legends of basketball.

**The Most Demanding and Satisfying Game**

 Michael Jordan’s team won. The only thing at stake was their personal pride, their desire to always give their best. Their audience was restricted to themselves. Hours later, in Barcelona, Team USA went on to change the history of international basketball forever as they went on to win the gold medal. Yet they all agreed that the most demanding and satisfying game had already been played in Monte Carlo.

 Heroism comes from within. Greatness is not measured by the applause of the crowds but rather by the inner satisfaction of knowing that we have lived up to our potential.

 The reality of our own lives is that unless we are famous celebrities our challenges are most often calls to personal duty and commitment to moral values viewed by no one but ourselves, and applauded only by our own conscience.

 The Talmud teaches that in the World to Come G-d shows us the lives we have lived as well as the meaning of its events from a divine perspective. Everything we ever did in private, all the good deeds and the bad, are replayed without embellishment. It is then that we can clearly see our strengths and our weaknesses as well as the true purpose of what our lives were meant to be.

 And it is then that we fully realize that we actually were always playing to an audience – an audience of the One who really counts.

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