

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Leib *ben* Eliyohu *a”h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## PARSHAS MATTOS MASEI 5775

### Secrets of Masei

If you’ve ever looked at a map of a country like Egypt or Saudi Arabia (if you haven’t, you’re not missing much), you might notice something curious: Although the landmass is quite large, most of the cities are clustered around a relative tiny portion of the country (the Nile River, in Egypt’s case). There is a good reason for this: the huge uninhabited portion is by and large just barren desert.

### The Itinerary

This is one of the intriguing factors of this week’s *parshah*. The beginning section of parshas Masei is comprised, for the most part, of names: a lengthy list of all the places to which B’nei Yisrael traveled while sojourning in the desert – which gives rise to a few obvious questions: Why would such a seemingly insignificant swath of land be replete with so many named locations? And why would the Torah, known for its extremely conservative word usage, expend so much space just listing place after place through which the people passed in their travels?

The issue is somewhat compounded further by the practice in many congregations, when reading this section from the Torah, to adopt the joyous reading-tune employed for certain key passages such as *Az Yashir*. Publicly reading the hymn of praise offered by Yisrael after their deliverance from Mitzrayim (Egypt) would appropriately occasion the use of such a triumphant tune. But why, exactly, is the listing of various, seemingly insignificant travel-stops the cause for glorious celebration?

To gain insight into this issue, R’ Moshe Shternbuch (*Ta’am V’da’as*) draws our attention to a somewhat mysterious passage from the Mishnah. (Prior to its elucidation, we will first cite the passage and provide a more straightforward translation.) The Mishnah states (*Eduyos 2:9*):

וּבְמִסְפַּר הַדּוֹרוֹת... וְהוּא הַקֶּץ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר קָרָא הַדּוֹרוֹת מֵרֵאשִׁית, אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְעַבְדִּים וְעַנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה, וְנֶאֱמַר וְדוֹר רְבִיעִי יָשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה.

“And in the number of generations... and the ending date. As it states (*Yeshayah 41:4*), ‘He summons the generations from the beginning.’ Even though it states (*Bereishis 15:13*), ‘And they will enslave and oppress them for 400 years,’ it also states (*ibid. v. 16*), ‘and the fourth generation will return here.’”

### Double Deadlines

The commentators go to great lengths to clarify these enigmatic words. The Ra’avad explains this passage in a most interesting way, seeing the Mishnah as setting forth a foundational

principle in the workings of *galus v'ge'ulah* (exile and redemption). When a Heavenly decree is promulgated regarding a given exile, two separate dates will be advanced to signify the time-duration; one will be expressed in numbers of years, the other through generations. The Mishnah provides the example of the Egyptian exile. The Torah states that the bondage will last for *400 years*, but it also mentions that the exiles will return after *four generations*.

How could there be two deadlines? The Ra'avad explains that even when the exile itself and its associated persecution has elapsed, this does not automatically translate into redemption. The actual deliverance arrives at a later date. As such, the bondage in Mitzrayim ended at the end of the 400-year period. But the full redemption did not take place until forty years later, when the fourth generation returned to the Land.

A similar phenomenon, the Ra'avad continues, was manifest in the Babylonian exile. The exile itself lasted for seventy years; but even as the exiles came back, the redemption was not complete until some years later, with the return of Nechemiah and the rebuilding of Yerushalayim.

### ***Ge'ulah* (Redemption): Old and New**

And then the Ra'avad adds a most noteworthy point, which may resolve the issue raised at the outset. So it will be, he states, with the future redemption. One day in the near future, Hashem will bring the *ge'ulah*. But this will also be a two-stage process. Even after the deliverance comes, the Jewish people will not immediately return to the Land. First, *Hashem will lead them through the desert*, as prophesied by Yechezkel: "And I will take you out from the nations and gather you from the lands into which you had been scattered... And I will bring you to the desert of the nations..." (*Yechezkel 20:34,35*). Rashi there identifies this "desert of the nations" as the desert through which B'nei Yisrael travelled for forty years.

R' Shternbuch explains the significance of this most remarkable statement: The future redemption from the current *galus* will be patterned, in many respects, after the redemption from Egypt. As the *passuk* states (*Michah 7:17*): "As in the days of your leaving Mitzrayim, I will show you wonders." Thus, when the final redemption arrives, the Jewish people will once again travel through the same desert-route as our forefathers did before entering the Land of Israel.

What emerges, then, is that the route outlined in this week's *parshah* is not merely insignificant historical data. Rather, every step of B'nei Yisrael's journey, through all the various locations, was actually laying the groundwork for the ultimate redemption – may we merit to see it soon!

This means that the entire section of B'nei Yisrael's travels in this week's *parshah* is a treasure trove of secrets, outlining the exact program of the final *ge'ulah*. Of course, the full extent of these hidden meanings will only be revealed in the future era. But the above idea provides us with a new perspective on this section of the Torah; reading through the list can engender hope and faith, with the realization that we are in effect reading the itinerary of our own redemption. And so, focusing on these hope-inspiring thoughts, we (literally) strike a triumphant note.