

Discourse 36

“*U’Mikneh Rav... -
An abundance of livestock...*”

Delivered on Shabbat Parshat Matot-Masei,
Shabbat Mevarchim Menachem-Av, 5729
By the grace of *HaShem*, blessed is He,

1.

The verse states,¹⁰⁰⁴ “The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had an abundance of livestock – very great. They saw the land... and behold, the place was a place for livestock... they said... let this land be given to your servants as a heritage; do not bring us across the Jordan.” In the discourse by this title, said one-hundred years ago in the year 5629,¹⁰⁰⁵ [the Rebbe Maharash] explained that the root of why the children of Reuven and the children of Gad requested [the land] on the other side of the Jordan river, is as explained in a discourse of the Alter Rebbe¹⁰⁰⁶ about the difference between Yosef and the other tribes.

That is, the other tribes were shepherds, meaning that they chose an occupation that would not be distracting them, so that they could be a chariot (*Merkavah-Vehicle*) for Godliness even while engaged in the work, and would thus not come to be

¹⁰⁰⁴ Numbers 32:1-5

¹⁰⁰⁵ Sefer HaMaamarim 5629 p. 281 and on.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Maamarei Admor HaZaken 5565 Vol. 1 p. 192 and on; Hosafot to Torah Ohr, Vayechi 103a and on; Also see Ohr HaTorah Matot p. 1,339.

in a state of separateness [from Godliness] because of preoccupation with this world.

In contrast, this was not so of Yosef, for even while engaging in worldly matters, as the verse states,¹⁰⁰⁷ “He entered the house to do his work,” meaning,¹⁰⁰⁸ “To check the accounting ledgers,” such that he was engaged in his occupation, and even later, when he was the viceroy of Egypt, he was busy to the extreme, as the verse states,¹⁰⁰⁹ “By your command shall all my people be sustained... and without you no man may lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt,” this being a very great occupation, nevertheless, there was no obstruction in this whatsoever to his service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. That is, even while being occupied with the conduct of the kingdom or calculating the accounts, at the very same time he was a chariot (*Merkavah-Vehicle*) for Godliness.

In other words, every one of the tribes was perfect in his service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, being that Yaakov's “bed was perfect,”¹⁰¹⁰ except that within service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה itself, they were divided into two movements.

This is because the tribes are rooted in aspect of the twelve oxen of the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*) - “the world of separateness” (*Olam HaPirud*)¹⁰¹¹ as a result of which their relating to and engaging in worldly matters could cause a state of separateness in them from their adhesion to Godliness in a way of a chariot

¹⁰⁰⁷ Genesis 39:11

¹⁰⁰⁸ Onkelos to Genesis 39:11

¹⁰⁰⁹ Genesis 41:40-44

¹⁰¹⁰ Midrash Vayikra Rabba 36:5; Rashi to Genesis 47:31 and elsewhere.

¹⁰¹¹ See Torah Ohr, Vayeishev 28a and on, and elsewhere.

(*Merkavah-Vehicle*). Because of this, when they had to choose an occupation, as the verse states,¹⁰¹² “*HaShem*-יהו"ה your God will bless you in all that you **do**,” they chose to be shepherds. For, since this occupation is done outside the commotion of the city, they would not be distracted in their service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

In contrast, Yosef was the aspect of the Upper Righteous One (*Tzaddik Elyon*),¹⁰¹³ in that he was rooted in the world of Emanation (*Atzilut*), where all matters are in a way of oneness, [as it states],¹⁰¹⁴ “He and His life force are One; He and His organs are One,” such that it is called “the World of Oneness” (*Olam HaAchdut*).¹⁰¹⁵

That is, even the matter of being a world (in that even Emanation (*Atzilut*) is called a “world-*Olam*-עול"ם”)¹⁰¹⁶ is in a way of Oneness (*Achdut*) and in the World of Oneness (*Olam HaAchdut*) it does not apply for one matter to disturb or distract from another matter.¹⁰¹⁷ Thus, even occupation in worldly matters did not cause any separation in his adhesion to Godliness in the aspect of a chariot (*Merkavah-vehicle*).

This is also why the children of Gad and the children of Reuven asked for [the land on] the other side of the Jordan river, a place for livestock. This is because they chose to be

¹⁰¹² Deuteronomy 15:18

¹⁰¹³ See Zohar I 153b; Torah Ohr, Terumah 80d; Likkutei Torah, Re'eh 25d; 27d

¹⁰¹⁴ Introduction to Tikkunei Zohar (3b)

¹⁰¹⁵ See Likkutei HaShas of the Arizal, beginning of Mesechet Shabbat, and elsewhere.

¹⁰¹⁶ See Sefer HaMaamarim 5710 p. 112.

¹⁰¹⁷ Also see Ohr HaTorah ibid.

shepherds, so that worldly matters would not distract them from their service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

2.

However, we still must better understand this, because what we explained above about the difference between Yosef and all the other tribes, is not enough to explain the difference in the tribes themselves, between the children of Reuven and the children of Gad and the other tribes.

Now, this can be explained according to the statement in Midrash,¹⁰¹⁸ that the tribes of Reuven and Gad distanced themselves from theft, and therefore the Holy One, blessed is He, gave them their inheritance in a place where there is no theft, as the verse states, “behold, the place was a place for livestock etc.”

The explanation of the inner aspect of these matters is that just as there is a matter of theft on the side opposite holiness, there likewise is a matter of theft on the side of holiness. This refers to the general matter of affecting refinements (*Birurim*). For, since the sparks of holiness are found in the physical things of the world, the act of affecting refinement and appropriating the spark of holiness within the physical thing, is a matter of theft.

This is also understood from what Midrash states,¹⁰¹⁹ “Yaakov said to Esav, ‘Before us are two worlds, this world and

¹⁰¹⁸ Midrash Kohelet Rabba 1:13; 3:10; Also see Bereishit Rabba 72:1 and Maharzu commentary there.

¹⁰¹⁹ Yalkut Shimoni Toldot, Remez 111

the coming world... you take this world and I will take the coming world... at that moment Esav took this world as his portion and Yaakov took the coming world as his portion. Later, when Yaakov came back from the house of Lavan and Esav saw that he had sons and daughters, servants and maidservants (“the dew of the heavens and the fatness of the earth”¹⁰²⁰ in the literal sense) he said to him, ‘Yaakov, my brother, didn’t you tell me that you will take the coming world and I will take this world? From where do you have all this wealth...?’” Thus, since Esav argues that his portion is this world, we find that taking the sparks of holiness found within the physical things of this world is a matter of theft. This is like the verse,¹⁰²¹ “He took a captive from it,” in that we take the sparks of holiness from the enemy etc.

It thus can be said that when it states that the children of Reuven and the children of Gad distanced themselves from theft, this means that they did not want to engage in stealing the sparks of holiness, by being engaged in worldly matters upon entering the Land. They therefore asked to receive a portion on the eastern side of the Jordan river.

Based on this, the two Midrashic teachings about the children of Gad and the children of Reuven can be aligned. That is, the above-mentioned Midrashic teaching that they distanced themselves from theft, which speaks in praise of them,¹⁰²² and the Midrashic teaching which is the opposite of praising them, in that they made that which is primary

¹⁰²⁰ Genesis 27:28

¹⁰²¹ Numbers 21:1

¹⁰²² Also see Ohr HaTorah, Matot p. 1,340.

secondary and that which is secondary primary, in that their wealth (their flocks) were more precious to them than their souls etc., and about them the verse states,¹⁰²³ “An inheritance seized hastily in the beginning [its end will not be blessed].” For, according to the inner meaning of the matter of theft [in the side of holiness], distancing themselves from “theft” is the opposite of their praise, being that they did not want to engage in the toil of affecting refinements etc.

3.

Now, when Moshe heard that the children of Reuven and the children of Gad did not want to enter into the Land and engage in the toil of affecting refinements (*Avodat HaBirurim*), because of their fear that engaging in worldly matters would distract them from their adhesion to Godliness, he responded to them with words of rebuke etc.

The explanation is that, as known,¹⁰²⁴ Moshe’s work was to draw down the aspect of Knowledge-*Da’at*, even into the aspect of the “seed of animal.” This is the meaning of the verse,¹⁰²⁵ “I shall provide grass in your field for your cattle.” In other words, since he is from the aspect of the Upper Knowledge (*Da’at Elyon*) which **transcends** the world of Emanation (*Atzilut*), he therefore was able to draw down Knowledge-*Da’at* even into the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*).

¹⁰²³ Proverbs 20:21

¹⁰²⁴ Torah Ohr, Mishpatim 76b

¹⁰²⁵ Deuteronomy 11:15

From this it is understood that Moshe grants empowerment to the tribes, in that even though they are rooted in the twelve oxen of the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*) (the aspect of “your cattle”) they will nevertheless be able to engage in physical things in a way that will not distract them from their service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

However, to do so, the matter of self-sacrifice (*Mesirat Nefesh*) is necessary. It is about this that Moshe told them,¹⁰²⁶ “If you arm yourselves before *HaShem*-יהו"ה... and the land will be conquered... this land will be a heritage for you.” That is, through this, they too will have the elevation that came upon entering the Land, about which the verse states,¹⁰²⁷ “The Land is very very good.”

That is, even though the other side of the Jordan river is included in the category of the “Land of Israel” compared to other lands, and as stated by the Tzemach Tzeddek,¹⁰²⁸ “It would appear that tithes and priestly gifts are Biblically required there, as well as all *mitzvot* that are tied to the land,” nevertheless, in the land of Israel itself there are various levels of elevation.

This is as stated in Midrash,¹⁰²⁹ “There are ten sanctities: The Land of Israel is more sacred than all lands... The Land of Canaan is more sacred than the east bank of the Jordan river etc.” That is, the other side of the Jordan is included in the sanctity of the Land of Israel, which is more

¹⁰²⁶ Numbers 32:20-22

¹⁰²⁷ Numbers 14:7; See Likkutei Torah, Shlach 37b and on.

¹⁰²⁸ Ohr HaTorah ibid.

¹⁰²⁹ Midrash Bamidbar Rabba 7:8

sacred than all other lands, but it nonetheless is unlike the sanctity of the Land of Canaan etc.

Thus, for the children of Reuven and the children of Gad (who received their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan river) to have the elevated level of the Land of Israel in a complete way, the matter of self-sacrifice (*Mesirat Nefesh*) was necessary, to “arm yourselves before *HaShem*-יהוה,” for the war of conquering the Land.

4.

Now, all the above may be connected to the statement at the beginning of the Torah portion,¹⁰³⁰ “Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes... This is the thing that *HaShem*-יהוה has commanded: If a man takes a vow etc.” [That is, it discusses] the matter of vows and the annulment of vows by a wise sage (a solitary individual who is an expert)¹⁰³¹ who retroactively uproots the vow.¹⁰³²

The explanation¹⁰³³ is that a vow is the matter of abstinence, as our sages, of blessed memory, stated,¹⁰³⁴ “Vows are a fence to abstinence,” and is within the aspect of Understanding-*Binah*.¹⁰³⁵ Now, from the aspect of

¹⁰³⁰ Numbers 30:2-3

¹⁰³¹ Rashi to Numbers 30:2

¹⁰³² Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 74b

¹⁰³³ In regard to the coming section also see Ohr HaTorah, Matot p. 1,273 and on; p. 1,326 and on; Discourse entitled “*Vayedaber... Roshei HaMatot*” 5630 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5630 p. 226 and on), and elsewhere.

¹⁰³⁴ Mishnah Avot 3:13

¹⁰³⁵ See Shaarei Orah of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, translated as Gates of Light, Gate Eight (*Binah*) and elsewhere; Pardes Rimonim, Shaar 23 (Shaar Erchai HaKinuyim), Ch. 14 (section on “vow-*Neder*-נדר”).

Understanding-*Binah*, in which there begins to be the existence of [the sense of] “somethingness” (*Yesh*), there is the matter of the vow (*Neder*), in that one separates himself from permissible things of the world, so that they will not distract him and bring him down from his level in the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

However, the wise sage (*Chacham*) uproots the vow. This is because from the perspective of the aspect of Wisdom-*Chochmah*, which is the matter of the nullification of [independent] existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*), that “He is alone and there is nothing besides Him,” this being the level of Wisdom-*Chochmah*,¹⁰³⁶ there is no room to be concerned that worldly matters will distract him from service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, and he therefore does not need to abstain from the permissible.

On the contrary, in Talmud Yerushalmi¹⁰³⁷ it states that “man is destined to give an accounting for everything his eye saw and he did not eat.” This is because through engaging in worldly matters he refines and elevates them to be receptacles for Godliness.

This then, is also the meaning of the verse, “Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes... This is the thing etc.” To explain, the “tribes-*Matot*-מטות” refer to the emotions (*Midot*), and the “heads of the tribes-*Roshei HaMatot*-ראשי המטות” are the aspect of Understanding-*Binah*, which is the source of the emotions (*Midot*), “the mother of the children,”¹⁰³⁸ whereas Moshe is the aspect of Wisdom-*Chochmah*.

¹⁰³⁶ Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 35 in the authors note.

¹⁰³⁷ Talmud Yerushalmi, end of tractate Kiddushin

¹⁰³⁸ Psalms 113:9

This then, is the meaning of, “Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes etc.” That is, this is the granting of empowerment from Moshe (the aspect of Wisdom-*Chochmah*) to the heads of the tribes (the aspect of Understanding-*Binah*) to affect the matter of the annulment of vows, so that it is not necessary to abstain from the permissible, but on the contrary, to refine and elevate them to holiness.

This is also the meaning of “This is the thing that *HaShem*-יהו"ה commanded,” specifying “This-*Zeh*-זה,” which is the aspect of Moshe, who prophesied with the word “This-*Zeh*-זה,”¹⁰³⁹ this being the matter of revelation in a way of seeing His Essential Being etc. From this aspect empowerment is granted for the general toil of affecting the refinement of the world.

All this is similar to the explanation above that Moshe is the one who grants empowerment to the tribes, who are the aspect of the twelve oxen of the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*), so that they will be able to be occupied in worldly matters in a way that will not distract them from their service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

5.

Now, as known, every matter in Torah is instructional to one's service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.¹⁰⁴⁰ The explanation is that every Jew must have both modes of service, similar to the children of Reuven and the children of Gad who

¹⁰³⁹ Sifri and Rashi to Numbers 30:2

¹⁰⁴⁰ See Zohar III 53b; Radak to Psalms 19:8

received their portion on the other side of the Jordan, but nevertheless had the matter of “armed shall you cross over etc.”¹⁰⁴¹

In general, this is the matter of the two modes of service - that of our forefathers and that of the tribes - meaning service in the aspect of His Upper Unity (*Yichuda Ila'ah*) and service in the aspect of His Lower Unity (*Yichuda Tata'ah*).¹⁰⁴²

As explained in Kuntres Etz HaChayim,¹⁰⁴³ even though the level of an average person is service of Him in the Lower Unity (*Yichuda Tata'ah*), nevertheless, everyone has an obligation to come to the nullification (*Bittul*) of His Upper Unity (*Yichuda Ila'ah*), which grants the empowerment and strength for his service in the Lower Unity (*Yichuda Tata'ah*) to be a perfect service, such that he will not fall from his level. That is, the primary mode of service is the toil of affecting refinements (*Avodat HaBirurim*), which is not in the way of His Upper Unity (*Yichuda Ila'ah*), but specifically is in the way of His Lower Unity (*Yichuda Tata'ah*).

We thus find¹⁰⁴⁴ that the people of Yericho would “bundle the *Shema*,” in that they did not pause between the word “One-*Echad*-אֶחָד” and the words “You shall love-*v'Ahavta*-וְאָהַבְתָּ” to recite, “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever-*Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto LeOlam Va'ed*-וְעַד מְלִכּוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם” in that their service was in the mode of the Upper Unity (*Yichuda Ila'ah*)

¹⁰⁴¹ Deuteronomy 3:18

¹⁰⁴² Ohr HaTorah, Bamidbar p. 7

¹⁰⁴³ Kuntres Etz HaChayim, Ch. 7-9

¹⁰⁴⁴ Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 56a

(that is, the verse,¹⁰⁴⁵ “Listen Israel, *HaShem* is our God, *HaShem* is One-*Shema Yisroel HaShem Elohei*”nu *HaShem Echad*-אחד יהוה יהוה אלהינו יהוה”),¹⁰⁴⁶ and this was an **undesirable** matter to the sages [which they did not approve].¹⁰⁴⁷

This is because one’s service is specifically primarily in the way of the Lower Unity (*Yichuda Tata’ah*), only that, at least, there also must be some small measure of the aspect of nullification (*Bittul*) of the Upper Unity (*Yichuda Ila’ah*), for then serving Him in the Lower Unity (*Yichuda Tata’ah*) will be **true** service.

The bond between the two above-mentioned modes of serving *HaShem*-יהוה, blessed is He, is like the bond between the two pieces of wood, Yosef and Yehudah.¹⁰⁴⁸ The empowerment for this is through Moshe, as explained before about the matter of the verse, “Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes... This is the thing etc.”¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 6:4

¹⁰⁴⁶ See Zohar I 18b; 12a; Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah, Ch. 7; Also see the introduction to Imrei Binah of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gateway to Understanding.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Mishnah Pesachim 4:8; Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 56a *ibid*.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Ezekiel 37:15-17

¹⁰⁴⁹ The conclusion of this discourse is missing.