

JULY 9, 2018

## Parashat Matot-Masei

### A New Role for Joseph's Descendants

...half the tribe of Menashe (Numbers 32:33)

ולחצי שבט מנשה (במדבר: לג)

As the Book of Numbers ends, the Israelites are on the verge of entering the land of Canaan, bringing the issue of appropriating property to each of the tribes front and center. While each tribe is set to receive a section in their new homeland, the tribes of Reuben and Gad request to settle outside the borders of Israel, just east of the Jordan, in account of their abundant cattle. Although Moses at first opposes, God grants their request. The Torah then adds that “half” of the tribe of Menashe will settle with the tribes of Reuben and Gad outside the land.

The commentary of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin suggests that the tribe of Menashe was far from in favor of settling outside the land of Israel. The Menashites abide by Moses's request knowing they must provide the tribes of Reuben and Gad with strong leadership and inspiration. Descendants of Joseph and known for their deep love of the land, the Menashites are trusted to maintain an unbreakable attachment to the land even when living outside its borders. Moses called on the tribe of Menashe to be a source of strength and a model of loyalty for their brethren. In highlighting this bravery and commitment to one another as Jews, *Parashat Matot-Masei* reminds us of the strength we draw united as Jews across the globe.

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, [Australia](#) ended direct aid to the Palestinian Authority in objection of that aid being used to pay Palestinian terrorist and their families. Instead, Australia's 10-million-dollar donation to the trust fund will now be rerouted to the United Nations' Humanitarian Fund for the Palestinian Territories, which provides Palestinians with health care, food, water, sanitation and shelter. Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop expressed concern that providing further aid would allow the PA to use funds for activities that “Australia would never support.” Australian lawmaker Eric Abetz welcomed Bishop's stance, saying that this latest decision helps “ensure that the Palestinian Authority can no longer use our aid to free up money in its budget for state-promoted terrorism.”

We in the Jewish community applaud Australia's integrity, courage and concern for the citizens of Israel in calling out the real and present danger posed to Israel from the PA. Ending direct aid to the PA because of payments to terrorists is a critical step in furthering the prospects for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. According to Israel's Defense Ministry, the PA in 2017 paid \$198 million to the so-called “martyrs' families fund” and \$160 million to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, adding up to 7% of its overall budget. The United States too has worked to end financial aid to the Palestinians that is used to fund terrorism, including the [Taylor Force Act](#) which was included in the 2018 omnibus act and signed into law in March 2018.

As we work across the globe to strengthen the prospects for direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians and for a two-state solution, it's critical that we keep the unified strength of the tribes of Israel displayed in the *parasha* in mind. Whether in Israel or settled outside the land, it is upon all of us to strengthen each other, standing up against destructive acts—such as state sponsored terrorism—and joining together in bravery and commitment. ■

## A Lesson From the “Cities of Refuge”

**And the cities shall be unto you for refuge (Numbers 35:12)**

**והיו לכם הערים למקלט (במדבר לה:יב)**

This week, *Parashat Matot-Masei* details the appropriation of the land of Israel and subscribes the governing laws of the people. A study of these adjudications, particularly that of the accidental killer, sheds insight on the true purpose of the nation of Israel. The complications of an accidental killer—who on the one hand takes a life and on the other does so unintentionally—are presented with a unique solution: “cities of refuge.” Those who have accidentally murdered others are sent to the cities to refine their character and come to terms with their hand in murder before returning home. The commandment of the “cities of refuge” is a signal; It conveys to the Israelites that the conquering of the land requires the establishment of a just and moral society and law system. Our tradition teaches that it was the Canaanites’ immoral behavior which drove them from the land. In contrast, the Israelites are taught that their success in the land is contingent on building a moral and safe society.

Today, the state of Israel continues to strive towards that creation of a moral and safe society. As Hamas operatives across the border set Israeli farmland ablaze with kites and balloons, the Israeli military is adopting innovative and moral ways to respond. One such strategy is the use of drones. Israel’s Air Force has been operating unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) for decades, mainly for intelligence gathering. Following a trend of applying simple consumer drones to combat, today the IDF uses over 400 drones and has over a thousand soldiers trained as operators. According to the head of the IDF drone department, Major Assaf Shaish, “drones let commanding officers make data-based decisions,” allowing the Jewish state to truly fulfill *Parashat Matot-Masei*’s commandment of moral self-defense.

Like all sovereign countries, Israel is committed to safeguarding her citizens from danger and—as seen with the growth of drone technology—is constantly innovating in how she does so. As Israel’s strongest ally, the United States has long defended Israel’s survival and security as its own national interests. By helping maintain Israel’s qualitative military edge (QME)—the ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat while sustaining minimal damages and casualties—[U.S. security assistance](#) to Israel thus embodies the importance this week’s *parasha* places on moral self-defense. The “cities of refuge” in the *parasha* symbolize the integral nature of Jewish self-defense, and we are reminded of the necessity of ensuring Israel can continue to do so even today. ■

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