



MASEI OUR TRAVELS & BEYOND

The Encampments are Part of the Travels

Parashas Masei records the 42 travels (the *masaos*) of the Jewish people throughout their sojourn in the desert, from the exodus of Egypt and all the way through Arvos Moav, until the people arrived in Eretz Yisrael.

Rashi states that most of these travels were spent in encampments, where they rested, with only a few of them being active journeys. However, *Rashi* at the end of *Parashas Shemos* says that not only were their journeys part of the *masaos*/travels, but even their encampments were included in these *masaos*/travels.

Why The Encampments Are Regarded As Part of the Travels

Simply speaking, this meant that they did not rest in these encampments for the sake of simply resting there, but for the sake of being able to continue on to Eretz Yisrael, and thus even these encampments are regarded as part of the travels.

Even more so, their encampments are considered as part of their travels because even when they camped, they were following Hashem's command of "*By the mouth of Hashem you will journey, and by the mouth of Hashem you will camp.*"

¹Even when they camped, they were prepared for Hashem to tell them to move on and keep traveling, so the encampments were not a situation of complete rest, but part of their journeys.

There is also a deeper reason why their encampments are seen as part of their travels: It is because as long as we live in this world, there is no such thing as complete rest. Therefore, even when they were resting when they camped, it is still regarded as if they were traveling.

Hashem created the world with six days for work, and a seventh day of Shabbos, for *menuchah*, rest. However, the Shabbos we have now is not a situation of complete rest. It is only a rest in relation to the six days of the week. Only in

the future will our Shabbos be on the level of complete rest. In whatever place a person is in, he can never completely rest there.

As long as a person lives, he is a creature of movement. Hashem has designed the world in a way that we are always in motion. Only a dead person is in complete rest. Those who are alive are always in motion; even when a person is immobile, the four cubits of his space can acquire things for him. Thus, even when man rests, the rest is never on a complete level. For this reason, even when the people camped, it was not regarded as their place of rest, but as part of their travels.

To understand this matter in clearer terms, and in language that applies to our soul, it is because in whatever place a person is in, he has an *avodah* to ascend higher than his current level. Therefore, man is always in moving. He can never be at rest, because if he is, he isn't trying to grow spiritually.

There is yet a deeper understanding of why the encampments was called their "travels": because none of these encampments could be regarded as their actual "place" to be in. Therefore, it is considered as if they were always on the go.

The Sages state that Hashem created our world to last for 6,000 years, and then it will be desolate for another thousand years after that.² Therefore, every situation on this world, without exception, is but a step of a larger process. Hashem has designed this Creation like one big ladder to ascend, with rung after rung, and a person's *avodah* is to keep ascending the ladder, rung after rung. Therefore, there is no situation which you can stay in forever, because you always have to see it as a step that leads to another step.

That is the way things will be until the future, when Hashem will renew the world and then the design will be changed. Until then, every situation we are in is but a step in the process, leading to another step after that.

¹ Bamidbar 9:18

² Sanhedrin 97b

Serenity In The Current Level, and Aspiration To Go Higher

For every step of the way that we find ourselves in, there are always two angles to consider.

On the one hand, a person needs to be serene in the place where he is. He needs some degree of *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity of the soul) and to be somewhat content where he is, because if he isn't he cannot be connected to the here and now, and then he will never get anywhere. On the other hand, a person also needs to have aspirations to get past the current level. He must want to get past where he is and rise higher spiritually. "Torah scholars have no serenity, not in This World and not in the Next World."³

We need *yishuv badaas* (composure of mind) in our current state. If a person is always trying to think of how he will get to the next level, he is not connected to where he is now, and then he will not succeed in getting to that level.

For example, when a person is learning a *daf Gemara*, if he keeps thinking about getting to the next page of Gemara, he will never succeed in the current *daf* he is learning. The Vilna Gaon said that when a person is learning Gemara, he must concentrate only on the current page of Gemara he is learning, as if there is no other page of Gemara that exists other than the page of Gemara in front of him.

However, we also need to aspire to a higher level than the current one. If a person has no aspirations to go higher in his Torah learning and he is simply

content with what he's learning now, of this it is said, "*Torah, what will be with it?*"⁴

So while a person must be fully concentrated on the page of Gemara he is learning, feeling serene where he is and not think of anything else other than what he's involved with, at the same time, he also needs to have the general aspiration of knowing a lot more Torah, and to be aware that the page of Gemara in front of him is but a step in the process.

In the example of learning Torah, a person needs to be connected to the current moment of his Torah learning, and to be content there. Simultaneously, he also needs to aspire for more, to know that the current page of Gemara is but a part of the Torah. However, this idea is also true with all situations of life. On the one hand, one needs to be connected to where one is now, and on the other hand, one also needs to know that one's current place is just a step in the process.

Serenity - Through Happiness With Your Share, and Feeling Hashem's Presence

To have a clearer understanding of this, to have serenity (*menuchah*) in your current situation includes two parts.

The first part of it is to be *someiach b'chelko*, "happy with one's share"⁵. Being happy with your share doesn't just mean to be happy with whatever you have accomplished so far (which is also true), but even more so, to be happy with your current situation.

The second part of it, which is deeper, is that after a person has merited to penetrate into his soul and to reveal more of his *neshamah*, he merits "*In any place in which My Name is mentioned, I will come to you*"⁶ – that wherever a person is, at any level he is at, he merits the revelation of Hashem's Presence with him. From there, he derives the deep, complete level of serenity.

When a person only has a superficial perspective, this is far from him. He will think of the revelation of Hashem's Presence as something that is far away from him, something which comes only at the end of all the levels. But if the light of truth has opened in the depths of his *neshamah*, he will be able to recognize that Hashem is really found with a person in every situation.

Of course, the degree of this revelation and how much a person will feel Hashem's presence will depend on the level of a person's soul, so it will be experienced on a different level with each person. But in any case, a person can reveal Hashem's presence in his situation, no matter what level he is at.

Hashem doesn't only become revealed to one who becomes a "perfected man" (the *adam hashaleim*) that the Ramchal depicts in *Mesillas Yesharim*, which comes all the way at the end of the ladder of growth. **Rather, Hashem can be revealed to a person at any level he is at. The higher a level a person reaches, the more clarity of His Presence there will be. But His Presence can always be felt, on some level.** There are thirty-six *tzaddikim* in every generation who merit "revela-

⁴ Berachos 35b

⁵ Avos 4:1

⁶ Shemos 20:21

³ Berachos 64a

tion of the *Shechinah*”, but the *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that there are many levels of “revelation of *Shechinah*”, so it is not experienced on the same level by each person. But at any level a person is at, there can be a degree of “revelation of *Shechinah*” – of feeling Hashem’s Presence.

When this awareness becomes revealed in the soul, a person becomes serene. This is the serenity we mention in the *Shabbos Minchah* prayer, **כי מאתך היא מנוחתם** – “For from You, comes their serenity.” It is a serenity that comes from Hashem, so to speak. The more a person recognizes Hashem’s Presence in his situation, the more *menuchah* serenity he will have, in turn.

This is also the secret behind *Shabbos Kodesh*, and specifically, the *menuchah* of *Shabbos*: it is because on *Shabbos*, Hashem’s Presence is more revealed. A person derives the true, deepest *menuchah* (serenity) from this higher source: from Hashem Himself, so to speak.

Thus, *menuchah* (serenity, namely in your current situation) contains two parts:

(1) *Someiach B’Chelko*, when one is “happy with his share” – not just to be happy with what you have reached until now, but namely, to be happy with what you’re dealing with now, for that is where your effort is, that is where your share is, and that is where you will be happy and serene.

(2) Through meriting a revelation of the “light of the *neshamah*”, a person reaches greater recognition of the Creator, and then in any situation where

he is in, he feels how Hashem is near him and with him. The greater one feels His Presence, the more serenity he will derive from it.

Every Situation Is A Step Of A Larger Process

So far, we have spoken about one side of the coin – the serenity you can have in your current situation. The other side of the coin, we mentioned, is to be aware that every situation you are in is but a step in a process. There is always another step that will follow.

Example: Contemplating The Third Beis HaMikdash

For example, in the days of mourning which we are in, where we mourn the *Beis HaMikdash*, you can reflect about the following.

In the times of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, when the *Beis HaMikdash* was rebuilt from its ruins, can we say that they were totally serene in that situation, just because they got the *Beis HaMikdash* back again? The Sages said that their happiness wasn’t complete, because five things were missing since the first *Beis HaMikdash*.⁸ There was still a lot left to be desired.

Even by the first *Beis HaMikdash*, which was built by Shlomo HaMelech, who was called the “*ish menuchah*” (man of serenity), it wasn’t like the third *Beis HaMikdash*, which will descend from a fire in Heaven and which will never be destroyed. Therefore, both the first and second *Beis HaMikdash* were each a step of a greater process, and they were each an incomplete situation. And even the third *Beis Ha-*

Mikdash, which Chazal guarantee will never be destroyed, is also but a step of a larger process, so it will not yet be a completely serene situation.

During these days of mourning, when we pray for the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*, we should realize that the third *Beis HaMikdash* is but a step in the grander scheme of things. The Sages said that the world will last for 6,000 years and then it will be destroyed for the next thousand years.⁹ That implies that even the third *Beis HaMikdash* will not be here forever! Chazal said that it will never be destroyed, but this means that it cannot be destroyed due to any sins of the Jewish people. Hashem will ‘destroy’ the world after 6,000 years, and the third *Beis HaMikdash* will be included in this as well. The entire Creation will become destroyed [and Hashem will renew the Creation], and we will go from a state of “*And they journeyed*” to the state of “*And they camped*.” So even the third *Beis HaMikdash* is not the final state – it is but a step of a larger process.

Thus, when our souls yearn and hope for the redemption, it should not be entirely about the building of the third *Beis HaMikdash*. If that is a person’s entire yearning for the future, it is a form of *katnus* (small-mindedness).

Taking this further, the *Ramchal* explains that after This World ceases at the end of the sixth millennium, there will then be a seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth millennium, which will be the situation of the World To Come. So even the World To Come is not the end goal. Also, the Gemara says that

7 *Beraishis Rabbah* 56:7

8 *Yoma* 9b

9 *Sanhedrin* 97a

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Torah scholars do not have any serenity, not in This World and not in the Next World.¹⁰ This means that even in the World To Come, they have no serenity. Whatever stage a person is at, there can never be complete serenity, because there is always another stage to rise to after that – whether a person is in This World, or in the next world.

When a person is content in his current situation, he enjoys it there, and he won't want to leave it. This is true both about physical pleasure as well as spiritual pleasure. When a person has deep, spiritual pleasure and serenity in his situation, he will not want to leave it.

This is the deep reason of why there is sadness of the soul on *Motzei Shabbos*, when it is sad that Shabbos has gone. When the soul enjoyed the serenity of Shabbos, it finds such pleasure there that it doesn't want to leave it. Yet, there is an even deeper level than this: a person can understand on *Motzei Shabbos* that the past Shabbos was but a step that leads to the next Shabbos. [When that is the perspective, his soul will find true solace on *Motzei Shabbos*].

No Situation Is Forever

If a person has serenity in his situation, he wants to remain there, and even if he also has aspirations to rise above it and go to a higher level, deep down, he still wants to remain there, because he is enjoying it so much. However, a person must understand that he can never remain forever connected to any given situation, even a spiritual one.

For example, on *Succos*, there are seven days of sitting in the *succah*, and after that, we leave the *succah*. If a person sits in the *succah* for another day, he transgresses the sin of *bal tosif* (“do not add”).

Whether in This World or in the Next World, a person must have the attitude of “*I am a stranger to the land*”¹¹. Not only must we feel like a stranger towards This World, but even when it comes to the spiritual, we must also recognize that we are ultimately a “stranger” that dwells in it temporarily. Therefore, we need to understand that someday, we will take leave of it all, where we will go to the next “step” of the process.

There is the Creator, and there are His creations. If a person cannot part from a certain situation because he is serene there, it is like *bal tosif*, because at a certain point, one must be able to take leave of the situation and go to the next one – even in the spiritual realm [thus enabling one to achieve integration with the Creator].

The Only Lasting Connection – To Hashem, Torah, and the Souls of the Jewish People

If a person, then, is never completely connected to any one situation – whether in this world or in the next what *is* he connected to?

The only eternal connection we can have is to Hashem, His Torah, and the souls of the Jewish people. There is no such thing as a “situation” that one is forever connected with. One cannot remain forever with his spouse, or his

children, or anything he owns. In order for a person to be fully connected to Hashem, Torah, and the souls of the Jewish people, he cannot remain forever in any one situation – whether in this world, or in the next world. Therefore, a person must make sure that he never becomes dependent on any one given place or time.

The more that a person is *someiach b'chelko* (happy with his current situation), together with a connection to Hashem, Torah, and the souls of the Jewish people – recognizing well that each situation we are in is always a step in the process, leading us to another step – this enables a person to feel “*I am a stranger to the land*”, both in this world and in the next.

Of course, if a person has a misunderstanding about this concept, he will only become melancholy when he hears of these concepts, feeling that the future of his existence is uncertain and hanging in the balance, like the *beinonim* whose fate hangs in the balance in the ten days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. But if a person has absorbed this concept well, he has come to recognize the depth behind the ultimate purpose of creation.

In Conclusion

During these days of mourning, on the one hand we need to hope and pray that the third *Beis HaMikdash* be rebuilt, speedily in our days; and, along with this, in the depths of the soul, we need to await the greater purpose of it all, which is the revelation of Hashem that will come to the world, which will be experienced in the heart of each individual.

¹⁰ Berachos 64a

¹¹ Tehillim 119:19

The Attitude of Ingratitude

There are many people who not only have difficulty with being happy (for the reasons mentioned earlier) but who also have difficulty being grateful and thankful for what they get. And instead of being grateful, they actually have complaints that they were gipped and that they didn't get enough.

Often, this stems from the problem explained earlier, the attitude where a person thinks that everything is supposed to be coming to him and that Hashem is obligated to give him everything. Not only does he think that Hashem must give it to him, but he also thinks that Hashem must give him exactly according to what he thinks he needs, and not according to what Hashem thinks he needs.¹

To illustrate, I once witnessed the following when I was in a store. A girl who was engaged to be married was shopping together with her father in a store, to buy food for a Shabbos Sheva Berachos. The father was loading a certain amount of shopping items onto the cart, according to his financial means, and his daughter wanted him to buy more. The father told his daughter that it was beyond his means to buy more, and she yelled backed at him that more had to be bought. The argument turned into a screaming match. The storeowner was there and recognized the family. She tried explaining to the girl, pleasantly, that her father was buying a generous amount of items, not a small amount at all, and in addition, she explained that the father is in the midst of paying for wedding expenses and that it wasn't right to make him pay more. It was simply beyond his means and she should be sensitive to her father's will. But the daughter, in her foolishness, got angry and defended herself: "My father hasn't spent that much money at all. He didn't buy me an apartment in Jerusalem, he bought me in Beitar. He spent so little on me." In order to show her disappointment in her father, she stubbornly held onto the items in the shopping cart and demanded that her father pay for them.

The average apartment in Beitar (at that time) costs \$350,000. The father was already spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy her an apartment. And this was besides for all the other wedding expenses, which is not a small amount. How could the daughter be so ungrateful? How can a person have this attitude that "If you don't give me everything I want, it's all worthless

to me!" Not only isn't the daughter grateful, but she is full of complaints and resentment, and she is angrily demanding that her father give her more, because she thinks that more is supposed to be coming to her.

The girl thinks that her father hasn't done anything good for her. She thinks that her father owes her everything, and therefore she thinks that she doesn't have to say a thank you. And if, G-d forbid he gives her any less than what she's thinking she deserves, she is going to pour hot coals on his head for this.

While a story like this doesn't happen often and it is alarming, everyone is affected by this attitude on some level. People live with the assumption that they deserve everything and that it's all supposed to be coming to them. Either a person thinks that his parents owe him, or that his spouse owes him (or a wife thinks her husband owes her), or that his children owe him, or that his friend that he one time did a favor for owes him, or that his downstairs neighbor owes him, etc. When the other does him a favor, he doesn't look at it as a favor, he looks at it a debt that the other is paying up! And then he sees if the other has fully paid his dues or not...

Chazal said, "Whoever denies the goodness done by his friend, in the end he will deny the goodness done to him by Hashem."² If a person doesn't recognize the good that is done for him which he has received from others, he also won't recognize the good that he receives from Hashem. This is especially because, according to his mistaken understanding, Hashem certainly didn't give him what he thinks should have come to him. He says to himself, "In the end, how much did Hashem give me? Even if He gave me some things, whatever He didn't give me far outweighs whatever He gave me. I have difficulties in livelihood, issues in my marriage, with raising my children, problems with my health, and more. Just because He gave me a few things (which He was supposed to give me anyway...) I have to thank Him for this little bit of good that He gave me??"

When people don't recognize the good that Hashem has given them, they have a hard time thanking Him. But if we think about this earnestly, Hashem isn't obligated to give us a thing. He could have left us with nothing. He didn't have to give us a strong power in our soul. So let us thank Him for everything He is given us – and especially thanking Him for giving us our strongest ability. Gratitude, *hakaras hatov*, is to "recognize the good" – to "recognize" that the good which Hashem has given us

¹ There can also be other reasons why people have difficulty thanking Hashem verbally, but that is a separate discussion and not for now.

² Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer 7

was not owed to us, but it was given to us as a gift. That will make it possible for us say “Thank You” to Hashem, from the depths of our heart.

One of the Torah’s 13 principles of faith is to believe that Hashem watches over us with Divine Providence, meaning that He gives us what’s truly good for us, and whatever is not good for us – He doesn’t give us. Thus, whatever we have is what’s good for us to have, and whatever we don’t have is for our own good – it would not be good for us if we would have the things that we don’t have. When we believe that everything we have is a gift from Hashem, and whatever we don’t have is because of His love and Divine Providence for us, we will become filled with joy over the good portion that has been given to us, and we can thank Hashem from the depth of our heart – both for what we have, and also for what we don’t have.

As a result of this, our desires for things that we don’t have will dissipate. Because if what we don’t have isn’t good for us, why would want it?

The strongest ability that Hashem has given us is what’s good for us personally. Anything else that we may wish we could have – which we don’t have – is good for us (not to have it). And that is why Hashem didn’t give those factor or those abilities to us – because it’s not good for us to have it. If we believe that, we will become happier with our strongest ability and we will thank Hashem - verbally, and from the depth of our heart.

Beginning Each Day With Gratitude To Hashem

Thus, in order to be happy with our strongest ability and utilize its potential, there are four factors. (1) Believe that your strongest ability has been given to you in Hashem’s Divine Providence to take care of your needs, and it is all for your good. (2) Know that He gave you your strongest ability as a gift to you – He did not owe you anything. (3) Feel grateful to Hashem by recognizing that your strongest ability is a gift to you. (4) Verbally express that gratitude to Hashem.

In order to ingrain these concepts in us, we need to do these things consistently, by setting aside time every day to think about these things and thank Hashem. In addition, there is also a wondrous advice which can help us for this: Saying *Modeh Ani* upon awakening in the morning. Whenever we say *Modeh Ani* in the morning, we should think about these points outlined above: “I am thankful before You, the King Who lives and exists, for You returned to me my soul, in mercy, with Your great trustworthiness” – for You have given me a total gift: my

strongest ability, which is the root of my soul and the source of my vitality, “In mercy”, for You love me and give me only what’s good for me, “Your great trustworthiness” – In Your Divine Providence for me.”

Alternatively, you can say *Modeh Ani* with the simple intention of the words, then wash the hands, and then think about these contemplations afterwards, thanking Hashem for your greatest ability, with the words above.

Either way, we should say the words from putting our heart into it and recognizing it, and not doing it by rote. It is wonderful advice which bears great results, because it is explained in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that the very first deeds of the day has a great effect on the rest of the day. It is for this reason that our Sages enacted the custom of saying *Modeh Ani* every morning. When we begin our day with thanking Hashem for the source of all our good – our personal strongest ability – its effect extends into the rest of the day as well. This makes it a lot easier for us to be happy with our strongest ability and activate its potential.

Strengthening Our Strongest Ability

It is very important to feel joyous about our strongest personal ability. This is because our soul is mainly developed and actualized through making use of our strongest ability – it is the pillar through which we can build a proper lifestyle. Through it, we can balance out the rest of our abilities, and thereby enter into deeper layers of our soul.

In order to reach all of this good, our strongest power must become a solidly built pillar, which is strong and firm. If a foundation is shaky, the entire building shakes and it can topple. The best way to turn our strongest power into a stable foundation is through being happy with it – and that, in turn, is what activates its potential.

Furthermore, since the source of our soul’s vitality comes from our strongest ability, the way to get vitality from it is through actualizing its potential, and the way to do that is through joy – through being happy about our strongest ability. Thus, it all depends on joy. When we are happy about our strongest ability, it will give us inner vitality. And it works the other way around as well - inner vitality from our strongest ability will also give us joy. Joy, and inner vitality, can each lead to the other, and they each strengthen each other, like “two beloved friends who never separate.” With joy and inner vitality together, our strongest ability can become turned into a solidly built foundation which will be strong and stable, upon which we can develop, strengthen, and actualize, our soul.

A Negative Attitude Vs. A Positive Attitude

We shall now emphasize again the benefit of taking the path of “Do good” when working with our soul – the gain of focusing on the positive, on our strong points, rather than focusing on the negative parts, on what’s wrong with us and what we need to work on and improve, etc.

There are many people who try to work with their soul and they are unsuccessful. This is because they come into it with an attitude that they are deficient and lacking, and they are bitter, angry, disappointed, frustrated, and in pain, about themselves. The evil that they are aware of in themselves is right in front of their eyes and they can’t ignore it, and they are barely finding any good in themselves. As a result, they look at the process of inner work entirely with a negative perspective, and they are full of complaints and resentment. Even if they don’t say it, their hearts are full of anger about it. With such an attitude, it is very difficult to work with the soul.

But when a person is recognizing his strongest ability and he becomes connected to it, and he believes that it has been given to him as a gift, in Hashem’s Divine Providence, from His endless love for him, he knows that this is the best thing he can get and he is thankful and happy for it. He is utilizing his strongest power and getting vitality from it and strengthening it. He is taking the wondrous path of “Do good”. By taking this path, a person mainly sees the good in him, and it’s getting stronger with time and it’s filling up his soul. With such a mindset, he can enter into the inner work with the soul, and build himself with a positive attitude in which he feels filled with good – instead of viewing himself with a negative attitude that he’s deficient.

[מהספר הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש]

NEXT WEEK- Writing A Book About Your Best Ability



נפש האדם עשויה רבדים רבדים - שכבות שכבות, והכניסה לרובדי הנפש על ידי מהלך של הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש היא המפתח לחיים הטובים, ובמילים חדות יותר - היא המפתח לעצם החיים. בכדי לחיות, עלינו לעבוד את הבורא יתברך ולקיים את מצוותיו, לבנות לעצמנו צורת חיים נכונה, מתוקנת ומלאת חיות ושמחה, להוציא את כוחותינו מהכח לפועל ולפתור את בעיותינו. כמו כן, עלינו להביט אל פנימיותנו, ולהיות באחדות - עם עצמנו, עם זולתנו, ועם בוראנו. והדרך לכך הינה; הכרה עצמית ועבודה מעשית של העצמת הנפש בצורה מובנית, יסודית, היקפית ועקבית.

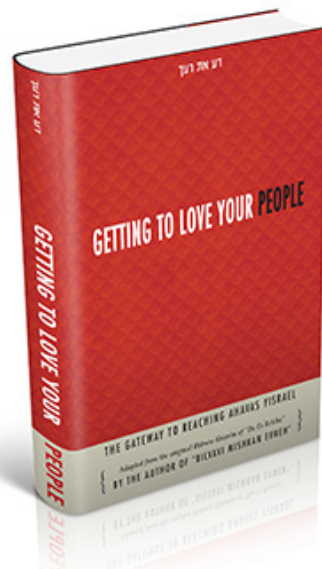
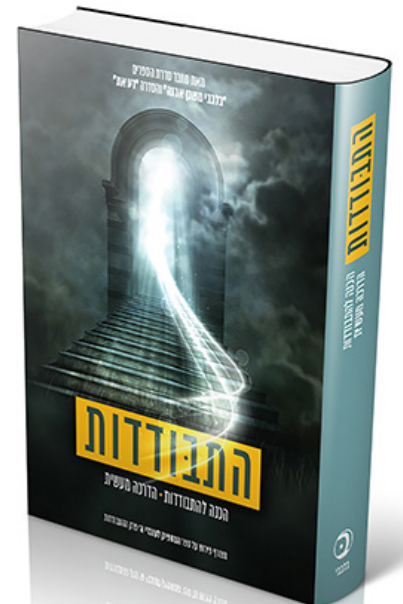
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אור החיים

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