



**Parashat Matot-Masa'ei**  
**Israel, Find Your Beauty. Because It's There**  
Rabbi Elisha Wolfin

Dear Friends,

Parashot Matot-Masa'ei are read together this year. They mark the end of the book of Bamidbar and the end of the journey in the wilderness.

Parashat Masa'ei enumerates the 42 stops which Bnei Yisrael made in their journey from the Fleshpots of Egypt to Arvot Mo'av. Every person can count 42 stations from the womb (the nurturing flesh) to the final rest.

A stop in Hebrew is “chanaya”, the root of which is **נ.ח** (“chen”), which means grace, favor, or beauty. Bnei Yisrael - as we do too - stopped at places in which they found “chen”, found grace and discovered their own beauty. We gravitate towards the places where we like ourselves!

When “chen” ended (which it always does), they moved on, seeking their next stop, their next “chen”.

The letters **נ.ח** also form “Noach” (comfortable) and “Nechama” (comfort or consolation). Those stops in the

wilderness were moments of grace; places of rest, consolation, and comfort.

Today is the Rosh Chodesh Av, marking the peak of “Bein Hameitzarim”, literally, the narrow straits, between the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av. But Am Yisrael has been in “narrow straits” for more than 2000 years, struggling to survive.

Survival allows for very little grace, rest, consolation, or comfort. Survivors, albeit admirable, often conceal their beauty and grace behind a tough shield. But their “chen” is there nevertheless! It’s always there.

Jeremiah, the prophet of the destruction and devastation, said (Chapter 31: 2-17):

"Thus said the LORD: 'The people escaped from the sword, **Found favor** (chen) in the wilderness. Eternal love I conceived for you then; Therefore I continue **My grace** (chen) to you. I will build you firmly again... The remnant of Israel... I will gather them from the ends of the earth... With compassion will I guide them... I will turn their mourning to joy, I will **comfort** them and cheer them in their grief... A cry is heard in Ramah— Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be **comforted**, for her children are gone. ... Restrain your voice from weeping, Your eyes from shedding tears; For there is a reward for your labor ... And there is hope for your future' —declares the LORD: 'Your children shall return to their country.'"

All Jews are survivors. We all “escaped from the sword”. We are tired, weary, and traumatized. And our struggle isn’t over.

But this Shabbat we are invited to find consolation, by

focusing on our “chen” - our beauty and grace - insisting on it, with its many comforting meanings.

The Lecha Dodi hymn will remind us this evening of the “chen” that awaits us, if only we reach out for it:

...Arise, go out from amidst the turmoil.  
In the valley of tears too long you have dwelt,  
And He will bestow compassion over you...  
Arise, now, shake off the dust,  
Don your robe of glory - my people - you must.”

Chodesh Tov, Shabbat Shalom, a Shabbat of Chen,  
comfort, and consolation.

Elisha