

The 42 Journeys in the Midbar Served as Preparation for Yisrael's Journeys throughout the Galuyos

As stated above, the Avodat Yisrael associates the 21 days and 21 nights of the three weeks of Bein HaMetzarim with the 42 journeys Yisrael travelled in the midbar. To truly appreciate this association, let us introduce an insight from the Megaleh Amukos (beginning of Matos-Masei). He writes that the 42 journeys in the midbar represent the source of the journeys Yisrael was destined to travel throughout all of the Galuyos until the coming of the Mashiach.

He finds an allusion to this fact in the first passuk of parshas Masei (Bamidbar 33, 1): **“אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ—these are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who departed the land of Mitzrayim, according to their legions, led by Moshe and Aharon.** He notes that the first letters of the first four words: **אלה מסעי בני ישראל**--are an abbreviation for **א'דום מ'די ב'בל י'ון**—the four primary exiles.

In the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (240), he adds that this is the reason the cantillations on the four words **אלה מסעי בני ישראל** are **“אזלא גרש מונח רביעי”**. In other words, **אזלא גרש** indicates that Bnei Yisrael are driven out of one country after another in exile; while **מונח רביעי** indicates that they will endure these wanderings during the four exiles alluded to in this passuk. Thus, the 42 journeys travelled by the generation of the midbar allude to all of Yisrael's exiles.

This same concept also appears in the commentary of the Sefas Emes (Bamidbar 5655): **“והנה דור המדבר הוציאו מכה אל הפועל, והיו הכנה לכל דורות בני ישראל, ויצאו ללמד על הכלל כולו, וזהו שכתוב שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל, שהם היו ראש לכל עדת בני ישראל וכל הדורות נמשכו אחריהם.”** The journeys of the generation of the midbar were the basis for the journeys that would be endured by all future generations of Bnei Yisrael. This is implied by the passuk (Bamidbar 1, 2): **“Count the heads of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael.”** In other words, the generation of the midbar represented the head of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael, and all future generations followed in their footsteps.

This indeed is the lesson conveyed by the Avodas Yisrael. The 42 days and nights of the 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim correspond to the 42 journeys that Bnei Yisrael travelled in the midbar. Thus, we should be encouraged by the fact that the 42 journeys Yisrael travelled in the midbar under the leadership

of Moshe and Aharon were the preparation HKB”H made for the future Galuyos. Just as Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael after completing these journeys in the midbar; so, too, will we leave our state of galut, emerging from darkness into a brilliant light, when we conclude these journeys, with the arrival of the future geulah, in the near future.

The 42 Time Periods of Bein HaMetzarim Correspond to the Leviim's 42 Cities of Refuge

I would like to explain the practical significance of the association the Avodas Yisrael makes between the 42 journeys mentioned in parshas Masei and the 42 time periods—21 days and 21 nights—of the Bein HaMetzarim. As we learned, Ezra HaSofer arranged for parshas Masei to be read during the three weeks of Bein HaMetzarim. Let us suggest that he did so, because these 42 periods of time correspond not only to the 42 journeys but also to the 42 cities of refuge of the leviim, which are also mentioned in this parsha (Bamidbar 35, 6): **“את הערים אשר תתנו ללויים, את שש ערי המקלט אשר תתנו לנוס שמה הרוצח, ועליהם תתנו ארבעים ושתים עיר—the cities that you shall give to the leviim, the six cities of refuge that you shall provide for a killer to flee there, and in addition to them you shall give 42 cities.**

To better understand the connection, let us introduce the words of the great Rabbi of Apta, zy”a, in Ohev Yisrael (ibid.). He writes that even today when we no longer have actual cities of refuge, their function is fulfilled by the recitation of Krias Shema. The six words in the first passuk (Devarim 6, 4): **“שמע ישראל—ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד”** correspond to the six cities of refuge; whereas the 42 words in the passage of **“ואהבת”** correspond to the additional 42 cities of the leviim.

It appears that we can expand on his idea based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 86b): **“אמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כשגגות... והאמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכויות. לא קשיא, כאן מאהבה, כאן מיראה.”** In other words, when one performs teshuvah motivated by **“yirah”**—fear of punishment—intentional, deliberate transgressions are viewed as unintentional and accidental. Yet, if one performs teshuvah motivated by **“ahavah”**—love of Hashem and sincere remorse—the deliberate transgressions are transformed into merits. With this in mind, the sinner might think to himself: Seeing as my deliberate sins were transformed into accidental acts by means of teshuvah from **“yirah,”** why should I bother also performing teshuvah from **“ahavah”**?

As we learn from our sacred sources, this logic is flawed. For, even sins committed unintentionally require atonement. This is evident from the fact that HKB”H commanded such a sinner to bring a korban “chatat.” The reason being that even accidental, unintentional sins leave a blemish and stain on the pure, untainted neshamah. Failure to remove the stain by means of appropriate teshuvah will cause this person to commit deliberate aveiros. In the words of the Mishnah (Avos 4, 2): “עבירה גוררת עבירה”—**one aveirah leads to another aveirah.**

This then is the import of the teaching of the great Rabbi of Apta, zy”a. He wrote that the tikun for someone who killed inadvertently or who, chas v’shalom, committed a deliberate sin and only performed teshuvah out of “yirah,” is accomplished by reciting Krias Shema, which serves the function today of the cities of refuge. For, with the initial utterance of the six words of the passuk “שמע ישראל”—a person accepts upon himself the sovereignty of Heaven with awe and reverence—“yirah”; subsequently, with the utterance of the 42 words in the passage of: “ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך”—he accepts upon himself the sovereignty of Heaven lovingly—with “ahavah.” In this manner, his teshuvah from “ahavah” transforms all of his inadvertent transgressions into merits.

The Difference between the Six Cities of Refuge and the 42 Cities of the Leviim

Following this trend of thought, let us proceed to explain the connection between the four aspects of the number 42: (1) Yisrael’s 42 journeys in the midbar (2) the 42 cities of refuge (3) the 42 words in the passage of “ואהבת” and (4) the 42 periods of time that comprise the 21 days of the Bein HaMetzarim. We will focus on the profound significance of the fact that HKB”H gave the cities of refuge to the leviim. It behooves us to explore the connection between the cities of the leviim and the cities of refuge.

Additionally, it behooves us to examine why HKB”H divided the cities of refuge into two distinct categories. Let us review the passuk: **“The cities that you shall give to the leviim, the six cities of refuge that you shall provide for a killer to flee there, and in addition to them you shall give 42 cities.”** Seeing as all 48 cities were given to the leviim, it should have simply said: **“The cities that you shall give to the leviim, the 48 cities that you shall provide for a killer to flee there.”**

We find an explanation for this division in the Gemara (Makkos 10a): **הללו קולטות בין לדעת בין שלא לדעת, הללו לדעת.** “אמר אביי הללו קולטות בין לדעת בין שלא לדעת, קולטות שלא לדעת אינן קולטות.” In other words, the six official cities of refuge have the power to harbor the murderer even without his knowledge of his whereabouts. The 42 cities of the leviim, however, only afford the murderer safe harbor if he is aware that he is in a city of refuge.

Notwithstanding, this still deserves further clarification, especially in light of the Ohev Yisrael’s revelation that the six cities of refuge correspond to the six words of the passuk “שמע ישראל”, whereas the 42 cities of the leviim correspond to the 42 words of the passage “ואהבת”. Why do the six cities associated with the passuk “שמע ישראל” harbor the inadvertent offender under any circumstances, while the 42 cities associated with the passage of “ואהבת” require his awareness of his whereabouts?

The Profound Lesson Learned from Shevet Levi Who Did Not Inherit a Portion of Eretz Yisrael

To achieve a better understanding of the subject, let us examine the powerful words of our great luminary, the Rambam. He emphasizes the inestimable importance of shevet Levi, who were not allotted a portion or heritage in Eretz Yisrael. It behooves every “ben Torah” to review what the Rambam writes and etch it on his soul (Hilchos Shemitah v’Yovel 13, 10-13):

“The entire shevet of Levi are commanded against receiving an inheritance in the land of Canaan . . . as it states (Devarim 18, 1): “The kohanim, the leviim, all of shevet Levi, should not have a portion and an inheritance among Israel” . . . Because they were set aside to serve Hashem and minister unto Him and to instruct the public in His just paths and righteous judgments, as it states (ibid. 33, 10): “They shall teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Yisrael.” Therefore they were set apart from the ways of the world; they do not wage war like the remainder of the Jewish people . . . Rather, they are Hashem’s army, as it says (ibid. 11): “Hashem has blessed His legion” and He, Blessed is He, provides for them, as it states (Bamidbar 18, 20): “I am your portion and your inheritance.”

Not only shevet Levi, but any one of the inhabitants of the world whose spirit generously motivates him and he understands with his wisdom to set himself aside and stand before Hashem to serve Him and minister to Him and to know Hashem, proceeding justly as G-d made him,

removing from his neck the yoke of the many calculations which people seek, he is sanctified as holy of holies and Hashem will be his portion and heritage forever and will provide what is sufficient for him in this world like He provides for the kohanim and the leviim.”

Notwithstanding, the words of the Rambam demand clarification. For, seemingly, the opposite should hold true. Specifically, shevet Levi, who accepted upon themselves the yoke of Torah, deserve a more respectable portion in the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael. Should they forfeit their portion and inheritance in Eretz Yisrael, because they accepted upon themselves the yoke of Torah? Furthermore, they didn't even receive a portion of the spoils from the conquest of Eretz Yisrael.

The Ultimate Goal Is for Man to Recognize that Olam HaZeh is Only a Passageway

It appears that we can explain the matter based on what we have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 4, 16): **”רבי יעקב אומר, העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא, התקן עצמך בפרוזדור כדי שתיכנס לטורקלין—Rabbi Yaakov would say: Olam HaZeh resembles an antechamber to Olam HaBa. Prepare yourself in the antechamber, so that you will be able to enter the banquet hall.** Thus, we learn that the purpose of creating man in Olam HaZeh is for him to always remember that this world is merely a passageway. It is imperative to occupy oneself with Torah and mitzvos here in order to gain access to the banquet hall—namely Olam HaBa.

It is with great pleasure that we can interject what the Alshich hakadosh writes in parshas Emor (Vayikra 23, 33) regarding the Gemara's (Menachos 29b) statement that Olam HaZeh was created with the letter **“hei.”** This coincides with the elucidation in the Midrash (B.R. 12, 10) related to the passuk describing the creation (Bereishis 2, 4): **”אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם - these are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created (”בהבראם”)--” בהבראם” implies that He created them with the letter “hei.”**

This, indeed, is the message conveyed by the Gemara's (Succah 2a) elucidation of the passuk (Vayikra 23, 42): **”בסוכות תשבו שבעת:—You shall dwell in succot for seven days.” The Torah said: For all seven days you should abandon your permanent dwelling and sit in a temporary dwelling.** The Torah is teaching us a valuable lesson. A person should recognize that the seven days

allude to the seventy days of a man's life in Olam HaZeh; they are only a temporary dwelling; they are not his permanent and ultimate dwelling.

It was precisely for this reason that HKB”H created Olam HaZeh with the letter **“hei,”** because the letter **“hei”** alludes magnificently to the shape of the succah. As we learn in the Gemara (ibid. 6b), the minimum requirement for a succah is two proper walls and a third that is at least a **“tefach.”** Similarly, the letter **“hei”--ה--** has two complete, intact sides and a third side that is short and disconnected. Thus, we can infer that Olam HaZeh, which was created with the letter **ה** is only a temporary dwelling. This concludes his sacred remarks.

All Sins Stem from the Desire to Make Olam HaZeh a Permanent Dwelling

Clearly, all sins stem from the fact that a person forgets that Olam HaZeh is merely a temporary dwelling—a sort of antechamber or passageway. He is obliged to dedicate his life in Olam HaZeh to Torah-study and the service of Hashem, so that he will be allowed to subsequently enter the banquet hall—Olam HaBa. By relating to Olam HaZeh as a permanent dwelling, he wastes his life engaged in the meaningless pursuits of Olam HaZeh. We can suggest that this is alluded to by the word **תשובה**, which can be broken down to **תשובה**. This implies that a sinner must perform teshuvah by recognizing that Olam HaZeh was created with the letter **“hei.”**

Based on what we have learned, we can begin to comprehend why HKB”H decreed that Yisrael go into galut as punishment for their sins. Now, HKB”H brought them into the Eretz Yisrael, the land of milk and honey, even though the danger existed that they would become enamored and occupied with matters pertaining to Olam HaZeh. The Torah expresses this possibility as follows (Devarim 32, 15): **”--וּישמון ישורון ויבעט” Yeshurun became fat and kicked.** HKB”H intended for them to partake of the fruit of the land and to become sanctified with the kedushah of the land. This would enable them to overcome their earthly desires and to avoid being dragged down by material matters and temptations.

However, everyone doesn't consume the fruit of the land with the proper kedushah. Therefore, HKB”H created the remedy prior to the malady. Prior to partaking of the fruit of the land, Yisrael must first set aside **“terumos”** and **“ma'asros”** for shevet Levi. Thus, they would recognize that the reason shevet Levi does

not possess fields or vineyards of their own in Eretz Yisrael is because they bear the yoke of Torah and HKB”H is their heritage. From shevet Levi they would understand that Olam HaZeh is merely a temporary dwelling, a passageway to Olam HaBa.

Yet, at the time of the churban, Yisrael sank spiritually, because they were overwhelmed by the desires of Olam HaZeh, as described in the books of the neviim. As a result, they treated Olam HaZeh as a permanent dwelling. Therefore, HKB”H exiled them from Eretz Yisrael. They were forced to wander in galut in lands that did not belong to them, so that they would feel like foreigners in Olam HaZeh. This would motivate them to perform teshuvah, allowing them to gain entrance to the banquet hall from the antechamber. In the words of David HaMelech (Tehillim 119, 9): “גר אנכי בארץ אל תסתר ממני מצוותיך”—**I am a stranger in the world; do not conceal Your mitzvos from me.**

42 Journeys in the Midbar Corresponding to 42 Cities of Leviim

We can now appreciate the amazing connection between Yisrael’s 42 journeys in the midbar and the 42 cities of refuge belonging to the leviim. As explained by the Megaleh Amukos and the Sefat Emet, the 42 journeys in the midbar were the basis for all of Yisrael’s journeys until the coming of our righteous Mashiach. It was imperative for HKB”H to inculcate in Yisrael the knowledge that Olam HaZeh resembles a desolate midbar, a temporary dwelling, which a person must pass through on his way to his ultimate destination.

We can suggest that this is why the Torah was given to Yisrael in the midbar. For, it is imperative that man recognize that if he wishes to attain the crown of Torah, he must always remember that Olam HaZeh is merely a midbar—a place where man sojourns for a brief period of time. All the while, he must study Torah and serve Hashem in preparation for the feast awaiting him in the banquet hall, in Olam HaBa.

It was for this reason that HKB”H gave the leviim 42 cities of refuge—places where inadvertent killers could find safe harbor. In these cities, the killers could learn directly from the leviim that Olam HaZeh is merely a temporary dwelling—an antechamber from which to enter the main hall, Olam HaBa. This coincides magnificently with the Ohev Yisrael’s assertion that the first passage of Krias Shema--“ואהבת”—containing 42 words, corresponds to the 42 cities of the leviim.

Let us elaborate on this notion based on our current discussion. A person must strive to recite the passage of “ואהבת” with proper intent—“kavanah”—devoting himself to love Hashem with all of his heart and soul and wherewithal, and to study Torah day and night, as it states in this passage: “ודברתם בהם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך”—**and you shall speak of them while you sit in your home and while you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise.** It is evident that a person who does this comprehends that Olam HaZeh is no more than a temporary dwelling in which he must study Torah day and night in order to gain access to Olam HaBa with his learning in hand. As we learned from the Rambam, such a person is just like a member of shevet Levi, who did not have a portion or inheritance in Olam HaZeh.

Six Cities of Refuge Corresponding to “שמע ישראל”

Continuing onward on this majestic path, we will now explain why HKB”H made a distinction between the six cities of refuge corresponding to the passuk of “שמע ישראל” and the 42 cities of the leviim corresponding to the passage of “ואהבת”. As explained above, the former afforded the inadvertent killer safe harbor whether he was aware of where he was or not; whereas the latter only harbored such a killer if he was fully aware of where he was. Let us refer to a notion that the author of the Tanya describes at great length in Likutei Amarim (19). We witnessed at times of persecutions that even the sinners of Yisrael and those who lacked knowledge and awareness—who under normal circumstances could not refrain from committing even casual aveiros—when forced to deny the existence of Hashem and to worship avodah zarah, even they were willing to sacrifice their lives for the kedushah of Hashem.

He explains there that seeing as they are descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, they contain a divine spark within them that they inherited from the holy Avos. When they are sinning, however, that holy spark is dormant. Yet, when confronted with sacrilege and the denial of Hashem, the spark awakens from its state of hibernation, because it cannot bear being separated from HKB”H, chas v’shalom. Here is an excerpt from what he writes:

“וכן הרשעים ופושעי ישראל... כשבאים לידי ניסיון בדבר אמונה שהיא למעלה מהדעת... אזי היא ניעורה משנתה ופועלת פעולתה בכח ה' המלוכש בה, וכמו שכתוב (תהלים עח-ה) ויקץ כישן ה', לעמוד בניסיון באמונת ה', בלי שום

טעם ודעת ושכל מושג לו, להתגבר על הקליפות ותאוות עולם הזה בהיתר ובאיסור שהורגל בהם ולמאוס בהם, ולבחור לו ה' לחלקו ולגורלו, למסור לו נפשו על קדושת שמו".

Even the reshaim and the sinners among Yisrael, when they are subjected to the test of emunah, which is beyond knowledge and comprehension, the divine spark within them awakens from its slumber and acts with the force of Hashem within it . . . it enables them to withstand the test of emunah in Hashem, without any rhyme or reason; they are able to overcome the klipot and desires of Olam HaZeh pertaining to permissible and prohibited matters, which they had become accustomed to, and to loathe them; they choose Hashem as their portion and their lot by sacrificing their lives to sanctify His name.

The practical significance of the six cities of refuge is now quite clear. They harbor the fugitive with or without his awareness. This teaches us that even the sinners of Yisrael and those who are clueless, who do not know how to withstand the yetzer, can still be included within the ranks of Yisrael. They need simply believe in the oneness of Hashem expressed by the six words: "שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד"; thus, they are absorbed into the congregation, even without their awareness.

On the other hand, the 42 cities of the leviim only harbor the fugitive with his knowledge. He must learn from shevet Levi, who were not given a portion or inheritance in the land. They reside in the 42 cities of refuge corresponding to the passage

"ואהבת את ה' אלקיך". They represent people who are willing to sacrifice everything related to Olam HaZeh for the love of Torah and the love of Hashem.

In this manner, we have achieved a better understanding of the amazing connection between the four vital entities associated with the number 42: (1) **42 journeys**, (2) **42 cities of refuge** (3) **42 words in the passage of "ואהבת"** and (4) **42 periods of time of Bein HaMetzarim**. They all share one common denominator; we must come to recognize that Olam HaZeh is merely a temporary dwelling—an antechamber in which we are supposed to prepare ourselves for the banquet hall, Olam HaBa. This was the purpose of the 42 journeys in the midbar; this is the awareness we are supposed to achieve during the 42 periods of Bein HaMetzarim.

This was the function of the 42 cities of the leviim that only harbored fugitives with awareness. It harbored those who were willing to emulate the leviim, who did not have a portion or inheritance in Olam HaZeh; the only heritage they required was Hashem. As we've learned, they correspond to the 42 words in the passage of "ואהבת". In conclusion, we must resolve during the 42 periods of Bein HaMetzarim to relate to Olam HaZeh as a temporary dwelling and not as a permanent dwelling. We must always remember that we are merely preparing ourselves in the antechamber to enter the main hall. In this merit, we will experience the total geulah, swiftly, in our times! Amen.

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