

The Amazing Connection between the Forty-two Journeys in Parshat Masei and the Seventy-two Days of Chesed from the Seventeenth of Tamuz to Rosh HaShanah

This Shabbas Kodesh, our brothers in “chutz-la’aretz” will read the double parsha Matos-Masei. Thus, the Torah portions read on any given Shabbas around the world will once again be aligned—since those of us living in Eretz Yisrael will read the parsha of Masei alone. It seems fitting, therefore, to write an essay on parshat Masei that will be germane to everyone. We will explore the common thread joining parshat Masei with the days of Bein HaMetzarim. As we know, the weekly Torah readings coincide amazingly with the time of the year in which they are read.

The Connection between the Forty-two Journeys and the Twenty-one Days of Bein HaMetzarim

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a sacred idea from the Maggid of Kozhnitz, zy”a, in Avodas Yisrael. At the beginning of this week’s parsha, we read (Bamidbar 33, 1): **“אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאותם: -- כיד משה ואהרן -- these are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who left the land of Mitzrayim with their legions, led by Moshe and Aharon.** Rashi points out that forty-two journeys are listed in this week’s parsha. Accordingly, the Avodas Yisrael explains the connection between these journeys and the days of Bein HaMetzarim as follows:

“והנה פרשה הזאת נקראת תמיד בין המצרים, שהם נחשבים כ”א יום כמו שפירש רש”י, וכ”א יום וכ”א לילות הם מ”ב, כנגד מ”ב מסעות שצריך לעבור בין המצרים בכמה מסעות לתקן הכל ולעבוד את ה’, הגם שהזמן גרמא להיות עצב ונאנח על חורבן בית ה’, עם כל זאת יש לחזק את עצמו ולטהר לבבו ולעבוד ה’ בתורה ותפלה בשמחה, בפרט בשעת אמירת שירות ותשבחות.”

This parsha is always read Bein HaMetzarim—which are considered to be twenty-one days, as Rashi explains. Twenty-one days and twenty-one nights add up to forty-two—corresponding to the forty-two journeys that one must make Bein HaMetzarim, to rectify everything and serve Hashem. Although it is a time of sadness, during which we bemoan the churban of Hashem’s house, nevertheless one must encourage oneself and purify one’s heart to serve Hashem through Torah and tefilah with happiness—especially while reciting songs and praises.

The Rashi he cites relates to the words of the navi (Yirmiyah 1, 11): **“ויהי דבר ה’ אלי לאמר, מה אתה רואה ירמיהו, ואומר מקל שקד אני”**—**“the word of Hashem then came to me, saying, “What do you see Yirmiyahu?” And I said, “I see a staff made of almond wood.”** Rashi comments in the name of a Midrash Aggadah that an almond grows and completes its development during a twenty-one-day period—corresponding to the number of days between the seventeenth of Tamuz, on which the city was breached and divided, and the ninth of Av, on which the House was burnt down. Similarly, in Sha’ar HaKavanot, the Arizal states that Bein HaMetzarim refers to the twenty-one-day period extending from Shivah Asar B’Tamuz to Tishah B’Av.

In reality, however, this period encompasses twenty-two days—the last thirteen days of the month of Tamuz and the first nine days of the month of Av. It appears, however, that the twenty-one-day count does not include Tishah B’Av itself, which is considered a “mo’ed”—a festival. As the Shulchan Aruch explains (O.C. 552, 12), tachanun is not recited on erev Tishah

B'Av, because it is called a "mo'ed." Additionally, it explains (ibid. 559, 4) that tachanun is not recited on Tishah B'Av itself, because it is referred to as a "mo'ed." We find this to be so in the following passuk related to Tishah B'Av (Eichah 1, 15): **קרא עלי' מועד— he proclaimed a "mo'ed" against me.**

In Imrei Pinchas (Tishah B'Av 388), the great Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz, zy" a, explains why Tishah B'Av is referred to as a "mo'ed," based on the statement in the Yerushalmi (Berachos 2, 4) that Tishah B'Av is the birthday of Mashiach ben David. Additionally, our holy sources explain, based on the Midrash (Eichah Rabbah 4, 14), that in the process of the churban of the Beis HaMikdash, HKB"H took out His wrath on the wood and stones of the physical structure, thereby sparing Yisrael from extermination.

Nevertheless, it is still incumbent upon us to comprehend and explain: (1) Why did the Maggid of Kozhnitz divide the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim into two distinct periods—the twenty-one days during which the sun shines versus the twenty-one nights during which darkness reigns? (2) What is the deeper connection between the forty-two journeys travelled by Yisrael in the midbar and the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim, which are divided up into twenty-one days and twenty-one nights, also totaling forty-two?

The Seventy-two Days from Shiva Asar B'Tamuz to Rosh HaShanah Equal חס"ד

It appears that the matter can be explained based on a precious gem found in the immaculate teachings of the great Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, zy" a, the author of the Bnei Yissaschar. In Agra D'Kallah (regarding the Haftarah of Matos), he points out that from the beginning of the period of Bein HaMetzarim until Rosh HaShanah, there are precisely seventy-two days—equivalent to חס"ד. The calculation is as follows: The last thirteen days of Tamuz, plus thirty days in Av, plus twenty-nine days in Elul, total exactly seventy-two days.

He explains the matter based on the opening passuk of the Torah (Bereishis 1, 1): **בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ—in the beginning, Elokim created the heavens and the earth.** Rashi points out that the name Elokim—representing "din"—is employed rather than the name Havaya—representing "rachamim." For, HKB"H initially thought to create the world based on the attribute of "din. He foresaw, however, that the world could not survive based on this strict standard. Therefore,

he preferentially partnered the midah of "rachamim" with the midah of "din." This partnership and preference for "midat harachamim" are evident in the passuk (ibid. 2, 4): **ביום עשות ה' אלקים ארץ ושמים**-- here both divine names are employed, but the name of "rachamim" precedes the name of "din."

Therefore, HKB"H demonstrates this preference on an annual basis, when He renews creation on every Rosh HaShanah. Seventy-two days of "chesed" always precede Rosh HaShanah, just as "rachamim" preceded "din," during the creation of the world.

There is an apparent difficulty that the Agra D'Kallah addresses. The seventy-two days preceding Rosh HaShanah include the days of Bein HaMetzarim, which are days of "din." After all, the two Batei Mikdash were destroyed during these days. So, how can we claim that all seventy-two days are days of "chesed"? He answers that even those days are in truth days of "chesed." For, as we learned from the Midrash above, Yisrael were spared and were not annihilated, because HKB"H took out His wrath on the wood and stones of the Beis HaMikdash rather than on them.

Seventy-two Days of Teshuvah for Not Having Rebuilt the Beis HaMikdash

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to expand on his sacred words. Upon examination of these seventy-two days of "chesed" preceding Rosh HaShanah, it is apparent that they begin with the days of Bein HaMetzarim—during which we mourn the churban of the Beis HaMikdash—and they conclude with the twenty-nine days of Elul—during which we perform teshuvah for all of the past year's transgressions. The combination of the two join together to form seventy-two days of "chesed." This enables us to mitigate the force of "din" on Rosh HaShanah.

Now, our holy sefarim teach us that the name of the month ז'מני ת'שובה מ'משמים ו'באים—**times of teshuvah are imminent.** It is also an abbreviation for: ז'רזים מ'קדימים ו'עושים ת'שובה—**diligent people perform teshuvah early.** So, alBeis the month of Elul is designated for teshuvah; nevertheless, the wise man is diligent and is careful to begin the teshuvah process already during the months of Tamuz and Av—when the Batei Mikdash were destroyed.

It appears that we can explain the matter based on a revelation from the great Rabbi of Apt, zy”a. In Ohev Yisrael (Likutim Chadashim), he teaches us that on Rosh HaShanah every person is held accountable not only for his transgressions but primarily for the fact that he did not merit having the Beis HaMikdash built during his lifetime. Here is what he writes:

”כי אף שבאמת צריך האדם להתפלל בראש השנה ויום הכיפורים על בני חיי ומזוני.... אבל כל זה צריך להיות בבחינת סוף וטפל, ועיקר התפלה צריך להיות בראש השנה ויום הכיפורים, דווקא על בנין בית המקדש שיבנה במהרה בימינו ועל גלות השכינה, ובל יהיה מחשבתו על עצמו ח”ו.”

ואם יאמר האדם מה לי לבנין בית המקדש. דע מה שאמרו חז”ל (ירושלמי יומא ה.) כל דור שלא נבנה בית המקדש בימינו כאלו נחרב בימינו, והרי אנו ח”ו כאלו אנחנו המחריבים את הבית המקדש, לכן צריך אדם להשים עיקר מחשבתו ותפלתו על בנין בית המקדש שיבנה במהרה בימינו, ואז יתגלה מלכותו בעולם.”

While it is true that a person must daven on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur for children, life and sustenance . . . nevertheless, those things are actually of secondary importance. It is imperative that the main focus of one’s tefilah on those days is specifically that the Beis HaMikdash be built--swiftly, in our times—and to demonstrate our concern for the galus of the Shechinah. One’s concerns should not be focused on oneself, chas v’shalom.

And if one should ask: What relevance is the Beis HaMikdash to me? Be aware of Chazal’s statement (Yerushalmi Yoma 5a): “Any generation during which the Beis HaMikdash was not built, it is as if it was destroyed in that generation.” So, it is considered as if we are destroying the Beis HaMikdash, chas v’shalom. Therefore, it is imperative that a person focus his thoughts and tefilah on the building of the Beis HaMikdash—swiftly, in his times. Thus, His sovereignty will be revealed in the world.

We can now appreciate the significance of the allusions associated with the name Tamuz: תמוז”ז - ז’מני ת’שובה מ’משמשים. We must understand that the time to begin the teshuvah process is already during the period of Bein HaMetzarim—when we mourn and lament the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. We must perform teshuvah for the fact that due to our countless sins, we did not merit having the Beis HaMikdash built during our lifetimes.

It is with great pleasure that we can now comprehend the wonderful allusion presented by the Agra D’Kallah. There are precisely seventy-two days during the span of time from Shivah Asar B’Tamuz until Rosh HaShanah—equaling **“chesed.”** As explained, the main focus of the “din” on Rosh HaShanah concerns the fact that the Beis HaMikdash has not been built yet, due to our inadequacies. As the Yerushalmi explains this is considered as if the Beis HaMikdash was actually destroyed in our times. Therefore, we begin the teshuvah process early in order to mollify and mitigate the force of “din” on Rosh HaShanah.

Two Corresponding Periods of Twenty-one Days One He-goat for Hashem and One He-goat for Azazel

As it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, I would like to explain the seventy-two days of “chesed” based on a valuable revelation provided by the Maharsha in Chiddushei Aggados (Bechoros 8b). Let us summarize his magnificent words.

Just as there are twenty-one days associated with the churban of the Beis HaMikdash—aimed at atoning for Yisrael’s sins; correspondingly, there are twenty-one days of teshuvah, extending from Rosh HaShanah until Hoshanah Rabbah—also aimed at cleansing Yisrael of their iniquities. A significant difference exists between them, however. The twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim are days of mourning and distress over the loss of the Beis HaMikdash. Whereas the twenty-one days in Tishrei are days of teshuvah characterized by simchah.

According to the Maharsha, these two periods of twenty-one days correspond to the two he-goats of Yom Kippur. The twenty-one days of teshuvah inspired by simchah, extending from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshanah Rabbah, correspond to the **“שעיר אחד”**—**one he-goat for Hashem**. Whereas the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim, characterized by mourning over the churban, correspond to the **“שעיר אחד לעזאזל”**—**one he-goat for Azazel**.

Let us elaborate. Had Yisrael performed teshuvah properly during the twenty-one days of simchah and Yom Tov, they would have been cleansed of their sins somewhat painlessly. These twenty-one days would act like the **“one he-goat for Hashem.”** The twenty-one days of distress and mourning over the churban and the galus would be deemed unnecessary. Seeing as Yisrael did not perform proper teshuvah during the twenty-one days

of simchah, HKB”H was compelled, so to speak, to cleanse them of their sins by imposing upon them a second set of twenty-one days, associated with churban and galus. This latter set of twenty-one days acts like the **“one he-goat for Azazel.”**

Thus, it turns out that we are given a choice annually. If we are smart, we will choose to rid ourselves of our iniquities by performing complete, wholehearted teshuvah during the twenty-one days extending from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshanah Rabbah that act like the **“one he-goat for Hashem.”** If we are successful, we will not need to be aroused to perform teshuvah during the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim, by means of churban and galus. In this merit, the complete geulah and the building of the Beis HaMikdash will become a reality.

Elokim said to Moshe “אהיה אשר אהיה”

Based on the Maharsha’s wonderful insight, we can better appreciate the significance of HKB”H’s response to Moshe Rabeinu in the following exchange (Shemos 3, 13):

“ויאמר משה אל האלקים, הנה אנכי בא אל בני ישראל ואמרת להם אלקי אבותיכם שלחני אליכם, ואמרו לי מה שמו מה אומר אליהם, ויאמר אלקים אל משה אהיה אשר אהיה, ויאמר כה תאמר לבני ישראל אהיה שלחני אליכם.”

Moshe said to G-d, “Behold, when I come to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, ‘The G-d of your forefathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” Elokim answered Moshe, “I Shall Be what I Shall Be.” And He said, “So shall you say to Bnei Yisrael, ‘I Shall Be has sent me to you.’”

Rashi addresses the fact that initially HKB”H mentions the name אהיה” twice; immediately afterwards, He only mentions the name אהיה” once. According to the Maharsha’s insight, this can be readily explained. He taught us that there are two sets of twenty-one days in our calendar—the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim and the twenty-one days from Rosh Hashanah to Hoshanah Rabbah. [Translator’s note: The gematria of אהיה” is twenty-one.]

The Maor V’Shemesh (Bereishis) states in the name of the Rabbi from Lublin, zy”a, that the name אהיה” alludes to the world of teshuvah. The name literally means “I will be.” Hence, it is as if a person is declaring that from this point forward, I will serve Hashem properly.

Now, since אהיה” possesses a numerical value of twenty-one, it can be viewed as an allusion to the fact that we have twenty-one days during which to perform teshuvah. However, there are two sets of twenty-one days in our calendar. Therefore, initially HKB”H says to Moshe: “אהיה אשר אהיה”—mentioning the name אהיה” twice, alluding to the two distinct periods of twenty-one days aimed at arousing Yisrael to perform teshuvah—one by means of “chesed” and “rachamim,” and one by means of galus and churban.

Seeing as HKB”H is merciful and kind, He prefers that Yisrael perform teshuvah by means of “rachamim” and “chesed” rather than by means of suffering. Therefore, HKB”H completes His remarks to Moshe: “ויאמר כה תאמר לבני ישראל אהיה שלחני אליכם”—employing אהיה” only once. For, in truth, HKB”H wants Yisrael to choose only the twenty-one days of “chesed” and “rachamim,” performing teshuvah motivated by ahavah from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshanah Rabbah.

During the galus in Mitzrayim, Yisrael were cleansed and refined by means of the insufferable servitude. Therefore, HKB”H alluded to them at that time that purification via suffering is not necessary. Yisrael have the option of awakening to teshuvah during the twenty-one days of “rachamim” and divine goodwill extending from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshanah Rabbah. Thus, HKB”H instructs Moshe to convey this vital message to Bnei Yisrael as follows: “כה תאמר לבני ישראל אהיה שלחני—only one אהיה”, one twenty-one-day period of teshuvah, is necessary.

The Reward for a Mitzvah Is a Mitzvah and the Reward for an Aveirah Is an Aveirah

With this in mind, let us focus on the avodah of teshuvah required of us, beginning with the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim. As stated above, the very name of the month Tamuz is an abbreviation alluding to the imminent process of teshuvah: ז’מני ת’שובה מ’משמשים ו’באים. Now, the Mishnah teaches us (Avos 4, 2): “ששכר מצוה מצוה ושכר עבירה עבירה”—**for the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah and the reward of a sin is a sin.** The Yismach Moshe explains succinctly (Eikev) and the Arvei Nachal explains at greater length (Shoftim 1) that when a person performs a mitzvah, the reward he receives from HKB”H represents a separate mitzvah in and of itself. For, he brought HKB”H pleasure by allowing Him to benefit one of His creatures.

Conversely, when a person commits an aveirah, compelling HKB”H to punish him—in order to stir him to perform teshuvah—the punishment itself represents an aveirah. After all, it distresses HKB”H to punish one of His creatures. We learn this from the following Mishnah (Sanhedrin 46a): **בשעה שאדם “מצטער שכונה מה לשון אומרת, קלני מראשי קלני מזרועי”—at the time that a person suffers, what expression does the Shechinah articulate? “I am burdened by My head; I am burdened by My arm.”** Rashi explains that is analogous to a person who is exhausted saying, “My head is heavy; my arm is heavy.”

This then is the meaning of the Mishnah in Avos: **ששכר “מצוה מצוה.** In other words, the reward HKB”H gives a person for performing a mitzvah is itself a mitzvah, because this person gave HKB”H pleasure. Similarly: **“ושכר עבירה עבירה”—**the punishment HKB”H metes out to a sinner is itself an aveirah, because this person caused HKB”H anguish. Accordingly, when a sinner performs teshuvah for all of his transgressions, he must also perform teshuvah for having distressed HKB”H, by compelling Him to punish him.

It is with great joy that we can now shed some light on the Agra D’Kallah’s incredible allusion. He pointed out that there are seventy-two days from Shivah Asar B’Tamuz to Rosh HaShanah—equaling “chesed”; they include the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim. According to what we have just learned, we must perform teshuvah during these three weeks for the anguish we caused HKB”H by compelling Him to punish us with the churban of the Beis HaMikdash and the demoralization of galus—in order to arouse us to teshuvah. For, we did not have the good sense to perform proper teshuvah during the twenty-one days of “chesed” and “rachamim,” extending from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshanah Rabbah.

Now, returning to Hashem’s good graces by performing teshuvah during these seventy-two days, and accepting upon ourselves to perform teshuvah motivated by ahavah, during the twenty-one days of “chesed” and “rachamim,” effectively mitigates the force of “din” on Rosh HaShanah. As a result, it will not be necessary for HKB”H to arouse us, chas v’shalom, by means of the “din” of **“one he-goat for Azazel.”** Instead, we will wisely wake up in response to the “rachamim” and “chesed” of **“one he-goat for Hashem.”**

Twenty-one Days of Bein HaMetzarim versus Twenty-one Nights

At this point, I would like to present my own explanation for the notion presented at the beginning of this essay in the name of the Avodas Yisrael. He suggested that the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim can be divided into two segments—twenty-one days and twenty-one nights. Together these two segments correspond to the forty-two journeys travelled by our ancestors in the midbar. We shall refer to the commentary of the Degel Machaneh Ephraim. He presents an extraordinary concept in the name of his elder Rabbi Yisrael, the holy Ba’al Shem Tov, zy”a. He claims that every Jew, without exception--from the day of his birth into the wilderness of Olam HaZeh until the day he departs this world--travels all of the same forty-two journeys travelled by Bnei Yisrael in the midbar. Upon the successful completion of these forty-two journeys, he merits entering the land of the living in the world of the neshamot.

He explains that the day a person is born and exits his mother’s womb is analogous to the exodus from Mitzrayim. Then a person travels one journey after another until he reaches the upper “eretz hachaim.” Certainly, these journeys were recorded in the Torah to guide a Jew along the proper path—so that he will know which path to choose as he moves from journey to journey throughout his life. Each and every journey is sacred and exalted; nevertheless, the nature of a journey and location can change due to people’s actions. Unfortunately, a place of kedushah can be transformed into the exact opposite. Yet, if people journey and arrive at these destinations without defiling them by their actions, each destination will surely illuminate their lives with its concealed light.

Now, based on our current discussion, we can postulate that the forty-two journeys travelled by Yisrael in the midbar correspond to the two sets of twenty-one days HKB”H employs to arouse Yisrael to perform teshuvah. Some journeys inspire teshuvah via “rachamim” and “chesed,” like the **“one he-goat for Hashem.”** These journeys correspond to the twenty-one days from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshanah Rabbah; they are represented by the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim. Unfortunately, sometimes a person is not aroused to perform teshuvah except by means of punishment and “din.” These journeys correspond to the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim.

This is why the period of Bein HaMetzarim itself is split into twenty-one days and twenty-one nights, corresponding to the forty-two journeys of the midbar. This division emphasizes that the choice is ours as to how we experience and act during this period. If we are smart, we will recognize that we have to perform teshuvah for having caused HKB”H anguish by compelling Him to subject us to the trials and tribulations of galus. This realization will prompt us to perform teshuvah inspired by “rachamim” and “chesed.” As a result, the twenty-one days of Bein HaMetzarim will be transformed into a period of “chesed” and “rachamim”—like the brilliant light of day. If, however, we fail to recognize this vital point and are not stirred

to teshuvah out of ahavah, then we will be subjected to the darkness and despair of galus—represented by the twenty-one nights of Bein HaMetzarim.

In summary, having entered the period of Bein HaMetzarim, we have already begun the sacred journey spanning the seventy-two days of “chesed.” From Shivah Asar B’Tamuz until Rosh HaShanah, we have the opportunity to mitigate and mollify the force of “din” that will prevail on Rosh HaShanah. If we put this opportunity to good use by performing proper teshuvah, HKB”H will release us from galus, take us out of the darkness, reveal His brilliant light, release us from servitude, and redeem us swiftly, in our times. Amen.



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