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## Gematria on the Parshah: 42 Journeys

By: Reb Moshe Herskovits



Parshat Masei opens with the 42 journeys that Am Yisrael traveled from Mitzrayim to Eretz Yisrael. We know Am Yisrael spent 40 years in the desert after the sin of the Golden Calf and the Spies, but why didn't Hashem take Am Yisrael straight into the land after Sinai? Why the 42 journeys? What can the 42 journeys teach us about our own life?

### Journey to Sinai

The Tosher Rebbe explains that Am Yisrael needed to make several pit stops before Mount Sinai in order to be tested and refine themselves. We know that there are 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, and each day of Sefirat HaOmer is to fix a different middah. This is what Am Yisrael was doing during these journeys. They were challenged in the uncomfortable desert, and for the 49 days leading to Shavuot they succeeded in passing these tests. In order to have a revelation of Hashem they had to refine themselves, and so too in order to merit Mashiach we must do the same.

Famously, the gematria of **בוט בל** (a good heart) is 49, for a good heart is the number one conductor for every positive middah. **הדמ** (character trait) also equals 49, alluding to this.

### Journey in the Desert

The Tosher Rebbe quotes the Zohar which says when Hashem said Anochi Hashem Elochecha, the impurity from the original sin left the Jewish people. If they would have entered Eretz Yisrael, it would have brought about the Messianic Era. However, sadly, because of the sin of the Golden Calf, which was incited by the Erev Rav (who represents the snake in the Garden of Eden), they fell back into sin, and darkness returned within them.

The sin of the Spies sealed that Am Yisrael had to travel 40 years in the desert, in order to be tested in the uncomfortable conditions to refine themselves of the yetzer hara. This is alluded to in the first verse of the parshah. The gematria of **אלה מסעי בני ישראל** (these are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael) is 819. It equals the same as two terms used in Chabad Maamarim. It is the same as **לברר מן הרע** (to separate the good from bad), **ימות תשובה עילאה** (supernal repentance), and **המשיח** (the Messianic Era).

The purpose of the remaining 42 journeys was for the sake of teshuvah, to remove the evil within, and to enter Eretz Yisrael and bring the Geulah. Unfortunately they failed, and we are still trying to bring the Geulah today.

### Journey of Our Own Lives

The Baal Shem Tov says every Jew goes through 42 different journeys throughout their lives. They serve the same purpose: to challenge a person, to give them the opportunity to rectify themselves.

The Tosher Rebbe says when we have a challenge we have to remember the darkness is

an opportunity. Every challenge is a chance to work on our character, and every time we work on ourselves we bring the Messianic Era closer. Gematria alludes to this. The gematria of **מסעות** (journeys) is 576, the same as **מניעות** (obstacles) and **סור מרע** (turn away from evil), the term used in David HaMelech's Tehillim.

The Tosher Rebbe says this is why we read the 42 journeys during the Three Weeks. During this time the yetzer hara is strengthened, and people go through more challenges, concealments, and darkness.

### Journey of the Three Weeks

The Kozhnitzer Maggid says the Three Weeks parallel the 42 journeys in the desert, and they are the greatest opportunity to rectify ourselves and bring the Mashiach. There are 21 days and 21 nights during the Three Weeks, equaling 42 together.

Amazingly, the gematria of **מסעות** is 618 which equals **כ"א ימים + כ"א לילות** (42 journeys is 618 which equals 21 days and 21 nights.)

This is why Shabbat Nachamu follows Tisha B'Av, where we read the Shema and the 10 Commandments. For after these 3 weeks of refining ourselves, we can reclaim the Torah and the opportunity to bring about Mashiach, when Hashem's oneness will be revealed to the world on an even higher level than at the revelation at Sinai.

**Challenge:** The next time you experience a challenge, try to bring in the awareness that is an opportunity to refine yourself, and bring Maschiach!

For more, check out the **Gematria Torah** channel on YouTube!

## Every Journey Has a Name

By: Reb Adam Klasner



Parshas Masei ends Sefer Bamidbar by doing something unexpected.

Instead of focusing on miracles, victories, or great moments of faith, the Torah lists every place the Jewish people traveled during their forty years in the desert.

Forty two journeys.

Forty two names.

At first glance, it feels unnecessary.

Why do we need to know every stop?

Because Hashem remembers every step.

We tend to judge our lives by destinations.

"I'll be happy when I get there."

"I'll finally feel at peace when I overcome this."

"I'll be enough when I become that person."

Hashem tells a different story.

He doesn't only remember where you ended up.

He remembers every place you stopped.

Every place you felt lost.

Every place you wanted to give up.

Every place you doubted yourself.

Every place you thought you were going backwards.

The Torah gives each one a name because none of them were meaningless.

Nothing was wasted.

One of the greatest lies we tell ourselves is that our struggles are interruptions to our lives.

The Torah teaches that they are our lives.

The confusion.

The waiting.

The setbacks.

The failures.

The moments when you felt disconnected from yourself, from others, or from Hashem.

They were never detours.

They were part of the journey that shaped the person capable of entering the Promised Land.

Many of us spend years trying to erase parts of our story.

The Torah doesn't erase them.

It sanctifies them.

It writes them down.

Because every place you have been contains a piece of who you are becoming.

Healing is not pretending the journey never happened.

Healing is looking back and realizing that Hashem never left you, even in the places where you felt furthest from Him.

As we close Sefer Bamidbar this week, perhaps the greatest blessing is not simply to reach our



destination.

It is to recognize that Hashem was walking beside us at every stop along the way.

And maybe, one day, we'll look back at the places we once called our greatest setbacks and realize they were actually the places where our soul learned how to come home.

## Grounded People Move Fastest!

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks



Nobody crosses a desert leaning on a green twig. To survive life's most grueling treks, you need a hardened staff. A fresh branch will bend under pressure, but a seasoned and weathered one holds firm, bearing your weight and anchoring every step of your journey.

This week we read a double portion, Matos and Masei. Matos literally means 'staffs' and signifies tribes. Masei means 'journeys.'

There are two Hebrew words for a stick (and both also mean tribes). But these words represent completely different states. One word, Shevatim, means branches that are still attached to the tree. Shoots that are attached to a tree are supple and flexible. The other word, Matos, signifies branches that have been cut from the tree and have toughened into unyielding poles. The Torah pairs Matos, the rigid rods, with Masei, the voyages. In doing so, it merges stability and internal strength with movement and transformation.

Some view life as a choice between holding on and moving forward. They see a trade-off that must be made. Do you compromise tradition in order to progress? Do you embrace the promise of an ever-evolving tomorrow, or do you anchor yourself in the stable values of your grandparents?

The merged double portion of this week shatters that framing. The truth is that motion without roots is an illusion. A leaf in the wind covers enormous distance but arrives nowhere, because the current chose its destination. Real progress begins only when inside you there is a solid, unbendable foundation. Our deepest connections to our eternal values are the seasoned staffs in our hands. That firmness is the reason the traveler survives the trek.

So here is your move. Decide what in your life is non-negotiable. What is the set of values that does not bend when the winds pick up? Let it harden in your grip like a sturdy staff. Then choose a journey you have been postponing, maybe a conversation or a leap you already know you are ready for, and take the first step leaning on your staff; your purpose.

The roots you carry are not meant to hold you in place. They exist for the sake of the journey. They enable you to travel farther. The solid staff of values and faith will carry you to the promised land!

## In Order

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



In Parshas Massei, the Torah records the marriages of the daughters of Tzelafchad: "And Machlah, Tirzah, Choglah, Milkah, and No'ah, the daughters of Tzelafchad, became wives of their uncles" (Bamidbar 36:11).

Rashi notes that throughout the rest of the Torah, the daughters are listed according to their wisdom. Here, however, they are listed according to age. Why? He explains that this was because they married in the order of their birth - oldest to youngest (Rashi on Bamidbar 36:11).

This observation has halachic implications.

For example, Tosfos records a responsum of Rabbeinu Tam concerning a case where a man declared, "your daughter is betrothed to me," without specifying which daughter. Rabbeinu Tam argued that even without any prior arrangement, one could presume he intended the oldest daughter. He reasoned based on Lavan's comment to Yaakov, "It is not done in our place to give the younger before the firstborn" (Bereishis 29:26) (Tosfos on Kiddushin 52a).

One might wonder what evidence is there that Jews observed the same convention of Lavan? Our Parsha supplies the answer. The Torah records that Tzelafchad's daughters married in birth order - not because they were required to, but because that was what was done. Rabbeinu Tam was drawing on a norm that the Torah had already confirmed (See Rashbam on Bava Basra 120a).

Although Rabbeinu Tam ultimately retracted his ruling, the underlying principle endures. Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that when two siblings are both engaged and a wedding date must be set, the older sibling's wedding should come first - not as strict Halacha, but as the proper ordering of two simultaneous Mitzvos (Igros Moshe, Even HaEzer 2:1).

And even when only one sibling is ready to marry, many suggest that speaking with an older unmarried sibling beforehand, acknowledging the situation with sensitivity, is an act of Kavod and Derech Eretz. Not because the law demands it, but because the expectation is real enough that ignoring it is its own kind of carelessness.

The Torah recording the simple fact that Tzelafchad's daughters married in order, oldest to youngest, reminds us of the sensitivity we must extend, and the honour we owe to those who came before us.

## The Journeys of a Lifetime

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



At the end of Sefer Bamidbar, the Torah records the forty-two journeys of Bnei Yisrael through the wilderness.

It is a surprising conclusion. Just before entering Eretz Yisrael, one might expect the Torah to describe the anticipation of crossing the Jordan or the preparations for conquest. Instead, it pauses to recount every stop along the way.

Why?

Rashi, quoting the Midrash (Tanchuma, Masei 3), compares it to a king whose son had been ill. After the son recovered, the father retraced the journey with him: "Here we rested. Here you suffered. Here your head ached." The purpose was not to relive the pain, but to show that every stage of the journey had meaning, and that the father had been with him every step of the way.

The Baal Shem Tov, as recorded by the Degel

Machaneh Ephraim on Parashat Masei, takes this one step further:

שמעתי מזקני זללה"ה שכל מ"ב מסעות הם אצל כל אדם מיום היוולדו עד שובו אל עולמו... והולך ממסע למסע עד שבוא לארץ החיים העליונה."

"I heard from my revered grandfather that the forty-two journeys exist within every person from the day he is born until he returns to his world... A person travels from journey to journey until he reaches the Supernal Land of Life."

The Torah is not merely recounting Jewish history. It is describing the life of every Jew.

Each of us has our own forty-two journeys. There are moments of inspiration and moments of failure; times of clarity and times of confusion; periods when Hashem's presence feels obvious and periods when we feel as though we are wandering through a desert.

The Netivot Shalom explains that these journeys are not only the journeys of that generation. They are the journeys of every generation and every individual. A Jew is never meant to remain spiritually stagnant. Every stage of life, whether it feels like progress or setback, is another journey through which Hashem is leading us closer to Him.

This idea is illuminated further by the teachings of the mekubalim. The forty-two journeys are associated with the שם מ"ב, the Forty-Two-Letter Name of Hashem, expressed through the prayer of Ana BeKoach. The forty-two words of Ana BeKoach represent a process of ascent: moving from concealment to revelation, from being bound to being lifted, from distance to closeness with Hashem.

Seen through this lens, the journeys were never random. Every encampment refined Bnei Yisrael. Every departure elevated them. Even the places associated with failure became indispensable stages on the road to Eretz Yisrael.

Perhaps this is why Sefer Bamidbar ends with the journeys rather than the destination.

Judaism measures greatness not only by where a person arrives, but by who he becomes along the way.

As we approach the Three Weeks, this message carries special significance. Before we mourn the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, the Torah reminds us that redemption is built one journey at a time. Every act of faith, every struggle overcome, every difficult stage accepted with emunah becomes another step toward rebuilding our own inner sanctuary.

Sometimes we look at our lives and ask Hashem, almost like a child in the back seat: "Are we there yet?"

But perhaps the deeper question is:

"What is Hashem trying to build within me at this stage of my journey — and if He were to write the Masei of my life today, would He simply record where I have been, or would each journey testify to the person I became because I walked it with Him?"

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