



“You led Your nation like a flock by the hand of Moshe and Aharon”

To Survive the Galuyos We Must Emulate the Simple Ideal Emunah of Moshe and Aharon

This upcoming Shabbas kodesh, we bless the month of “Menachem Av” and read the double parshiyos of Matos and Masei. In this essay, we will focus on a fascinating connection between the three weeks of “Bein HaMetzarim” and the parsha of Masei, which is always read on the second of these three Shabbasos. As we like to point out, this is significant, because Ezra HaSofer arranged the cycle of annual Torah-readings with deliberate intent (Megillah 31b). Hence, we will explore the profound wisdom and insights of Chazal apropos the vital lesson we are supposed to learn from this parsha that summarizes the 42 journeys travelled by Yisrael in the midbar prior to entering Eretz Yisrael. This is a lesson that should accompany us and strengthen us throughout our times of galus until we merit the final, complete geulah, swiftly in our times!

The Miracles Performed for Yisrael in the Merit of Moshe and Aharon

Parshas Masei opens with the following passuk (Bamidbar 33, 1): **“אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים—these are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who departed the land of Mitzrayim, according to their legions, led by Moshe and Aharon.** Chazal expounded on this passuk in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 23, 2): **This refers to what Scriptures states (Tehillim 77, 21): “You led Your nation (“נחית”) like a flock by the hand of Moshe and Aharon.”** They explain that the word

“נחית” is an acronym alluding to all the miracles and salvations performed on behalf of Yisrael in the midbar in the merit of Moshe and Aharon.

Rabbi Eliezer said: You wrought נִסִּים for them; You gave them חַיִּים; You split a יָם for them; You gave them a תּוֹרָה. And through whom? Through Moshe and Aharon. A second acronym is suggested: **Rabbi Yehoshua said: You wrought נִפְלְאוֹת (wonders) for them; You gave them חֵירוֹת (freedom); You saved them יְמִינְךָ (Your right hand) saved them; You gave them תְּלוּי רֹאשׁ (elevated status). Through Moshe and Aharon.** A third acronym is suggested: **And our Rabbis said: You raided נִבְיָאִים from amongst them; You raised חַסִּידִים (devout ones) from amongst them; You raised יְשָׁרִים (upright ones) from amongst them; You raised תְּמִימִים (perfect ones) from amongst them. Through Moshe and Aharon.** A fourth acronym is suggested: **Rabbi Akiva says: Your wrought נִזְרָאוֹת (awesome feats) against their enemies; You sent (flaring wrath) אֶגְרוֹת against them; You fought יָדְךָ (Your hand) fought them; You covered them in the תְּהוֹמוֹת (depths). Through whom? Through Moshe and Aharon.**

We will endeavor to understand why our blessed sages cited the words of David Hamelech here: **“You led Your nation (“נחית”) like a flock by the hand of Moshe and Aharon.”** And why did they exploit various acronyms related to the word “נחית” to glamorize the feats performed on behalf of Yisrael? After all, all the miracles HKB”H performed through

Moshe and Aharon are depicted explicitly in our parsha and elsewhere in Tanach. So, what chiddush did Chazal find in the words of David HaMelech that deserves mention and is not mentioned here?

The 42 Journeys in the Midbar Were Preparations for Yisrael's Journeys throughout the Galuyos

To explain Chazal's profound intent, we will refer to an important principle taught in the sacred comments of the Avodas Yisrael (Masei): **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 adds 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 refers to concerns the words of the prophet Yirmiyahu (1, 11): **"יהי דבר ה' אלי לאמר, מה אתה רואה" —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 21-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.

In reality, however, there are actually 22 days from Shivah Asar B'Tamuz to Tishah B'Av. This minor discrepancy can be reconciled easily if we assume that the Midrash was only taking into account the days that precede Tishah B'Av. After all, those 21 days were days of preparation for the churban of the Beis HaMikdash, after the city had been breached on Shivah Asar B'Tamuz. During those days, the possibility still existed to prevent the churban, if the people would have repented and performed sincere

teshuvah. Thus, HKB"H waited patiently for 21 days—like a developing almond—in anticipation of the burning of the Beis HaMikdash. Tishah B'Av, however, the day on which the Beis HaMikdash was actually destroyed is not part of the tally.

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 cited above: **"אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאותם ביד משה ואהרן."** He notes that the first letters of the first four words: **א'ל'ה מ'סעי ב'ני י'שראל**—allude to **א'דום מ'די ב'בל י'זן**—the four primary exiles.

Thus, it appears that our blessed sages intended to teach us in the Midrash that Yisrael's ability to succeed and survive the 42 journeys in the perilous midbar is attributable to their simple, resolute faith in the leadership of Moshe and Aharon. They followed these two loyal shepherds like a flock of sheep. In the words of the Midrash (ibid.): **Just like a flock, wherever the shepherd leads it, it follows him willingly; so, too, Yisrael, everywhere that Moshe and Aharon led them to journey, they would journey willingly after them. As it states: "These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael." This corroborates that which is stated: "You led Your nation like a flock."** From this, it should be evident that this is also true of all the galuyos; to succeed and survive, we must follow the leaders of Yisrael who have replaced Moshe and Aharon.

With the Midos of Netzach and Hod Moshe and Aharon Led Yisrael on the Proper Path

I would like to explain in greater depth the profound intent of Chazal for citing the passuk: **"נחית כצאן עמך ביד משה ואהרן"**. We will refer to a concept taught in the Zohar hakadosh and in throughout the kabbalistic literature. It is also taught by the author of the Tanya in Likutei Amarim (Chapter 3). HKB"H created the world with ten sefirot. They are divided into two groups. The

first group consists of the three sefirot: **חכמה, בינה, דעת**; they are akin to the brain in one's head. The second or lower group consists of the seven midos: **חסד, גבורה, תפארת, נצח, הוד, יסוד, מלכות**; they represent the limbs of the human anatomy, which HKB"H employs, so to speak, to manage what transpires in the universe.

The source for this is found in the Tikunei Zohar in the passage of Pesach Eliyahu (Introduction 17a): **Chesed represents the right arm; gevurah represents the left arm; Tiferes represents the torso; netzach and hod represent the two lower extremities; yesod represents the bodily extremity of the holy Bris; malchus represents the mouth associated with Torah she'b'al peh** (which explains all of HKB"H's royal decrees).

Additionally, our holy sefarim explain that Yisrael are guided by seven trustworthy shepherds: **Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and David**. They serve as the chariot or prototypes of the seven midos: **Chesed, gevurah, Tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod, and malchus**. According to this scheme, Moshe Rabeinu, the fourth shepherd, aligns with the midah of **netzach**, and Aharon HaKohen, the fifth shepherd, aligns with the midah of **hod**. They represent the two legs of the body of kedushah that led Yisrael during their forty-year sojourn in the midbar; they transported the body to wherever it was intended to go.

We can now better appreciate the elucidation in the Midrash on the opening passuk of the parsha: **"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who departed the land of Mitzrayim, according to their legions, led by Moshe and Aharon"**—citing the passuk in Tehillim: **"You led Your nation like a flock by the hand of Moshe and Aharon."** Since Moshe and Aharon—the prototypes of **"netzach" and "hod"**—were analogous to two the two legs of the body of kedushah, it was their job to lead the holy people of Yisrael on their 42 journeys in the midbar on their way to Eretz Yisrael.

It is surprising, however, that these two preeminent leaders of Yisrael only represented the two lower extremities of the body of kedushah. Undoubtedly,

legs are extremely important, seeing as a body cannot go anywhere without them. Nevertheless, the brain serves a much more important function than the legs.

In truth, we can explain the matter based on the writings of the Arizal. He teaches us that the roots of the neshamos of Moshe and Aharon are actually from the top three sefirot: **Chochmah, binah, and da'as**. After all, Moshe Rabeinu merited delivering the Torah to Yisrael, because his neshamah stemmed from the supreme chochmah from which the Torah emanates. In the words of the Zohar hakadosh (Yisro 85a): **"אורייתא מחכמה דלעילא נפקת"**—**the Torah emanated from the wisdom (chochmah) of the Divine**. Similarly, the following passuk attests to the greatness of Aharon HaKohen (Malachi 2, 7): **"כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו"**—**for the lips of the Kohen should safeguard knowledge, and people should seek Torah from his mouth**. Nevertheless, their kedushah was so great that their neshamos expanded from the lofty first three sefirot down to the lower midos to be the prototypes for the two midos of **"netzach" and "hod,"** representing the two lower extremities, so that they could lead the holy body of the people of Yisrael.

We can embellish this thought based on a teaching in Sefer Yetzirah related to the structure of kedushah (1, 5): **"נעוץ סופן בתחילתן ותחילתן בסופן כשלהבת קשורה בגחלת"**—**their end is embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end, like a flame in a burning coal**. Let us explain. Man's physical stature was created such that the lower part of his anatomy—the feet—would be intimately connected with the top of his anatomy—the three sefirot associated with the brain in his head. Conversely, the beginning of his anatomy, the brain in the head, must be connected with the lower part of his anatomy, the legs. This was the case with the elite neshamos of Moshe and Aharon. They were rooted in the highest three sefirot in the head and descended from that loftiest of places to the two midos of **"netzach" and "hod"** to function as the two legs of the body of the people of Yisrael. As such, they led them on the proper path throughout the 42 journeys in the midbar.

Netzach and Hod Are the Two Central Pillars of Simple Emunah

Following this enlightening path, we will proceed to explain the matter of Moshe and Aharon and their practical significance for each and every one of us. The holy Ba'al Shem Tov, zy" a, teaches us a valuable, fundamental principle how to serve HKB"H with all of the midos. The two midos "**netzach**" and "**hod**," specifically, are the two central pillars of emunah in Hashem. In fact, the entire structure of kedushah rests on them in the same manner that the human body stands on its two feet. The Gemara expresses this fact as follows (Makkos 24a): **"בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת, שנאמר וצדיק באמונתו יחיה"**—**Chabakuk came along and incorporated them (stood them) into one, as it says (Chabakuk 2, 4), "But the righteous person shall live through his emunah (faith)."**

The source for this idea is found in the Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Lech Lecha), who presents the avodah of the midos in the name of his mentor, the Ba'al Shem Tov. He writes: **"ונצח והוד שבאדם הוא עמודי קיימין, שהאדם מואמין אמונת הבורא על אמיתתו"**. In other words, the midos of "netzach and hod" in a person are the pillars on which his true emunah in the Creator is founded. Similarly, the Degel Machaneh Ephraim (Purim Drush) brings down in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov, his elder: **It is known that "netzach and hod" are two parts of the body, the two lower extremities, that are the key to emunah, two supports of the truth.**

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to explain how the concept of simple, unadulterated emunah is dispersed over the two central pillars of "**netzach and hod**." The pillar of "**netzach**"—the right leg—represents emunah in Hashem in good times—when a person is able to defeat his enemies and succeed in all of his endeavors. For, even in those situations, it is necessary to have a strong emunah in Hashem. Otherwise, a person is liable to entertain false beliefs the yetzer has introduced into his heart. As the Torah warns us (Devarim 8, 17): **"ואמרת בלבבך כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה, וזכרת את ה' אלקיך כי הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל"**—**and you may say in your heart, "My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!" Then you**

shall remember Hashem, your G-d, that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth.

In contrast, the pillar of "**hod**"—the left leg—represents emunah in Hashem in times of trouble. The reason this situation is called "**hod**" is because at such times, it is also necessary to express gratitude—"**l'hodot**"—to Hashem. As we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 33b): **"חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה"**—**a person is obligated to bless Hashem for the bad just as he blesses Hashem for the good.** So, even though a situation appears to be bad, nevertheless one thanks Hashem on account of the emunah that everything He does is for our benefit.

Now, this enlightens us as to why Moshe and Aharon were the prototypes for the midos of "netzach and hod." Although they achieved greatness in the Torah due to their association with the first three sefirot—"**chochmah, binah, and da'as**"—nevertheless, due to their extreme kedushah, they served Hashem with unwavering emunah. Thus, they epitomized the two legs of "**netzach and hod**." With the midah of "**netzach**," Moshe was able to defeat the Egyptians and all of Yisrael's enemies; while with the midah of "**hod**," Aharon was willing to sacrifice his life under the direst of circumstances, when Yisrael sinned with the eigel. He was willing to accept the blame rather than defaming Yisrael, so that they could make amends by means of teshuvah. With the strength and conviction of their unwavering emunah, they led Yisrael through the midbar and inspired them to also serve Hashem with this simple, pure emunah.

It is worth adding a quote from the Ba'al Shem Tov from the sefer Ba'al Shem Tov (Shemos 10). He told his students that even after all he had accomplished in the realm of Torah and mitzvos, and all the pleasure it had given him, he would put them all aside and simply hold onto his simple emunah: **"I am a simple man who believes!"**

"I considered my ways and returned my feet to your testimonies"

Continuing on this sacred journey, we will now explain why serving Hashem is described as walking,

as per the passuk (Devarim 13, 5): **“אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו ואותו—after Hashem, your G-d, you shall walk (follow), and you shall fear Him; you shall keep His mitzvos, and you shall heed His voice; you shall serve Him and cling to Him.** This is also evident in the following passuk (Vayikra 26, 3): **“אם בחוקותי תלכו”—if you will walk with (follow) My decrees.** Rashi explains that this means to labor in the study of Torah. Also, it is written (Tehillim 119, 1): **“אשרי תמימי דרך ההולכים בתורת ה'”—praiseworthy are those whose way is wholesome, who walk with the Torah of Hashem.**

In keeping with this discussion, this means that although the goal of Torah-study is to attain the incredible wisdom of the Torah, notwithstanding, the true goal is to fulfill all of the mitzvos with simple, unwavering emunah, as exemplified by the two legs of truth—**“netzach and hod.”** As we have learned, the entire body of kedushah stands on them, in keeping with the words: **“צדיק באמונתו יחיה”—a tzaddik lives through his emunah.**

This explains magnificently the exposition in the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 35, 1) related to the passuk: **“אם בחוקותי תלכו”.** Thus, it is written (Tehillim 119, 59): **“I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies.”** David said: **“Master of the Universe, each and every day I would consider and say, ‘I am going to this place and to that dwelling,’ but my feet would take me to Batei Kenesses and Batei Midrash.”** Thus, it is written, **“I considered my ways, and I returned my feet to Your testimonies.”**

In a sense, the Midrash is explaining why Torah-study is associated with walking, as we find in the passuk: **“אם בחוקותי תלכו”.** According to the Midrash, David HaMelech yearned to walk everywhere—both in the spiritual realms and the physical realms—contemplating the greatness of the Creator. But when all was said and done, he understood that the basis of all of his avodah was simply to believe in Hashem with unwavering emunah: **“But my feet would always take me to Batei Kenesses and Batei Midrash”—**to pray and study Torah with simple, unmitigated

emunah. For, that is what Hashem commanded me to do and wants from me: **“I considered my ways, and I returned my feet to Your testimonies.”**

The Legs of the Primeval Serpent Were Cut Off as Punishment for Corrupting Man’s Emunah

I would now like to propose to this royal audience an intriguing idea. After Adam and Chava sinned by partaking of the Eitz HaDa’as on the malevolent advice of the nachash, the evil serpent was punished. HKB”H removed its legs forcing it to crawl on its belly. Additionally, He cursed it decreeing that there would always be enmity between it and man, as it is written (Bereishis 3, 14):

“ויאמר ה' אלקים אל הנחש כי עשית זאת ארור אתה מכל הבהמה ומכל חית השדה, על גחונך תלך ועפר תאכל כל ימי חיך, ואיבה אשית בינך ובין האשה ובין זרעך ובין זרעה, הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב”.

Hashem G-d said to the nachash, **“Because you have done this, accursed are you beyond all the cattle and beyond all beasts of the field; upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will pound you on the head, and you will hiss at his heel.”** Rashi comments: **“רגלים היו לו ונקצצו”—it (the serpent) once had legs, which were later cut off.** In other words, man will win out over the nachash by stomping on its head and crushing it; whereas the nachash will win out over man by biting man’s feet. So, why did HKB”H select this specific punishment for the nachash hakadmoni—to deprive it of its legs?

Based on what we have learned, we have a marvelous answer. It is apparent that the nachash succeeded in trapping Adam and Chava in its treacherous web by introducing heretical thoughts and doubts in Chava’s mind. As the passuk teaches us (ibid. 4): **“ויאמר הנחש אל האשה לא מות תמותון, כי יודע אלקים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפחחו עיניכם והייתם כאלקים יודעי טוב ורע”.** **The nachash said to the woman, “You will not surely die; for G-d knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like**

G-d, knowing good and bad.” Rashi explains: The nachash argued: **“Every craftsman hates others of his craft; G-d ate from the tree and created the world.** So, by eating from the tree, **you will be like G-d, fashioners of the world.”**

In order to undermine Adam and Chava’s emunah in Hashem, the nachash blasphemed Hashem. Thus, it impaired the midos of **“netzach and hod,”** the two pillars that support emunah in Hashem. Therefore, HKB”H punished the nachash measure for measure—**“midah k’neged midah”**—by excising its legs. Since then, there has been a life-and-death battle between the forces of kedushah and the forces of the **“nachash hakadmoni.”** They oppose the two legs of kedushah, represented by **“netzach and hod,”** that support and fortify our emunah in Hashem. The strategy of the nachash is to remove these legs from the forces of kedushah by spreading its propaganda of heresy to undermine the emunah in Hashem.

This was apparent in the crucial, momentous battle waged by the guardian angel of Eisav with Yaakov Avinu (ibid. 32, 25): **“ויותר יעקב לכדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר, וירא כי לא יכול לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו.”** **And Yaakov remained alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. Upon realizing that he could not overcome him, he struck a blow to**

the ball of Yaakov’s thighbone, and it became dislocated, as they wrestled. According to the Zohar hakadosh, the malach struck a blow to the left thigh associated with the midah of **“hod.”** In truth, however, the right thigh associated with the midah of **“netzach”** was also damaged. In keeping with this discussion, this battle was a continuation of the battle started by the **“nachash hakadmoni”** to undermine the emunah of Adam and Chava.

In conclusion, we have succeeded in shedding some light on the profound words of Chazal. They expounded on the opening passuk of the parsha: **“אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאותם ביד משה ואהרן, זהו שאמר הכתוב נחית כצאן עמך ביד משה ואהרן”** They are teaching us that in every generation, it is incumbent upon us to continue following the path blazed by Moshe and Aharon. They are the two prototypes of the midos of **“netzach and hod,”**—the two central support pillars of emunah in Hashem. For this reason, Ezra HaSofer deliberately arranged that this parsha will always be read during the three weeks of Bein HaMetzarim to reinforce our emunah in Hashem, so that in exile, we maintain the simple, unwavering, absolute emunah demonstrated by Moshe and Aharon. In this merit, we will merit the complete geulah, swiftly in our times! Amen.



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