



## The 42 Interpretations of "אם בחוקותי תלכו" by the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh Invoke the 42-Letter Name to Mitigate the Decree of Galus

This week's parsha is parshas Bechukosai. In this essay, we will focus on the beginning of the parsha (Vayikra 26, 3): "אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם, " **"if you will follow My decrees and observe My mitzvos and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will yield its produce and the tree of the field will bear its fruit.** Based on the Toras Kohanim, Rashi comments: **"If you will follow My decrees": One might think that this is a reference to the fulfillment of mitzvos when it says "and you will observe My mitzvos." But that is already stated in the verse. What then is meant by the phrase "if you will follow My decrees"? That you should occupy yourselves in the labor of Torah.**

Now, in parshas Eikev, the Torah enumerates all the rewards HKB"H has in store for us in Olam HaZeh for fulfilling the mitzvos (Devarim 7, 12): "והיה עקב תשמעוּן: את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אותם... ואהבך וברכך והרבך וברך פרי בטנך ופרי אדמתך דגנך ותירשך ויצהרך שגר אלפיך ועשתורת צאנך... ברוך תהיה מכל העמים... והסיר ה' מגוך כל חולי... ואכלת את כל העמים." **And it will be because of your listening to these ordinances and your observing and performing them . . . He will love you; He will bless you and He will multiply you, and He will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land—your grain, your wine, and your oil; the offspring of your cattle and the herds of your flock . . . You will be the most blessed of all the nations . . . Hashem will remove from you every illness . . .**

**You will devour all the nations . . .** So, why does HKB"H choose to begin this week's parsha by focusing primarily on the rewards related to the produce and fruit that the land will yield?

### Parshas Bechukosai Is a Preparation for Chag HaShavuos --the Rosh HaShanah for the Fruits of the Tree

To explain the matter, we will refer to the teaching in the Mishnah (R.H. 16a) that the festival of Shavuos is the New Year for the fruits of the tree. On this festival, the world is judged as to whether or not the fruits of the tree will be bountiful. The Gemara elaborates: "מפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו שתי הלחם בעצרת, מפני שעצרת זמן פירות האילן הוא, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא הביאו לפני שתי הלחם בעצרת, כדי האילן הוא, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא הביאו לפני שתי הלחם בעצרת, כדי שיתברכו לכם פירות האילן." **Why did the Torah instruct us to bring the offering of "the two loaves" on Atzeres (Chag HaShavuos), because Atzeres is the time of judgment for the fruits of the tree. HKB"H said: "Bring before Me the two loaves on Atzeres so that the fruits of the tree will be blessed for you."**

Additionally, Chazal teach us that Ezra HaSofer arranged the weekly Torah-readings such that the curses—"klalos"—in parshas Bechukosai will be read prior to Chag HaShavuos (Megillah 31b):

"תניא רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר, עזרא תיקן להן לישראל שיהו קורין קלות שבתורת כהנים קודם עצרת ושבתורה קודם ראש השנה. מאי טעמא, אמר אביי ואיתימא ריש לקיש, כדי שתכלה השנה וקללותיה." **It was taught in a Baraisa: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar**



## A Wonderful Story about the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh

I would now like to share with my esteemed readers a fascinating idea. I would like to explain why it was orchestrated from above that the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh would propose 42 interpretations of the first passuk in this week's parsha: "אם בחוקותי תלכו". We will begin by introducing an intriguing story presented in the sefer **Shneim Asar Shivtei Yisrael**, authored by Rabbi Moshe Yair Weinstock, ztz"l. He heard the story from the brilliant tzaddik, Rabbi Yisrael Yitzchak Reisman, ztz"l, a "dayan" in the holy city of Yerushalayim, who had heard it from one of the leading kabbalists in Yerushalayim, the divine Rabbi Chaim Shaul Dweck, ztz"l, the author of Eifah Sheleimah on the Arizal's Otzros Chaim. He in turn had heard the story from his Rav and mentor, the esteemed Rabbi Mordechai Weingarten, ztz"l, who was the Rav in the Beis Midrash of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh in Yerushalayim.

The name of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh was Rabbi Chaim ben Atar. He was a craftsman skilled in weaving strands of gold. Since this was a lucrative craft, he only had to work several hours a day. He only kept a small amount of money for himself and used the rest to support the Torah-scholars studying in his Beis Midrash. At the end of every week, he customarily distributed loaves of challah and meat to the talmidei-chachamim. He would purchase a small ox, slaughter it, and divide up its meat to honor the Shabbas. Since their village was small, they did not slaughter very many animals.

On one occasion, all of the animals were deemed "treif" except for the one slaughtered by the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh. One of the wealthy men, a prominent man in the community, heard that the ox slaughtered by the Ohr HaChaim was deemed kosher. He approached the Rav and requested a portion of meat in honor of Shabbas. The Rav explained to him apologetically that the meat was intended exclusively for poor talmidei-chachamim, and he did not wish to leave even a single talmid-chacham without meat in honor of Shabbas.

In the midst of their conversation, a talmid-chacham entered. As was his sacred custom, the Ohr HaChaim handed him a portion of meat. In a fit of anger, the rich man exclaimed in a disparaging tone, "What, even this one is a talmid-chacham?!" The Rav did not react to this remark and remained silent. On the night of Shabbas Kodesh, the Ohr HaChaim dreamt that he was being held accountable in the heavens for having heard the rich man disparage a talmid-chacham without protesting. Hence, it was decreed in the heavens that he must accept upon himself to suffer the burden of galus for an entire year. Due to the kedushah of Shabbas, he remained where he was. On Motza'ei Shabbas, however, immediately after Havdalah, he packed up his belongings and left for galus.

On one Friday, while in galus, he passed through a field. He sat down to rest beneath the shade of a tree. He was engrossed in thoughts related to the parsha of the week, parshas Bechukosai. On that occasion, he came up with 42 ways to interpret the passuk "אם בחוקותי תלכו". Afterwards, prior to sunset, he entered the city and went to the Beis Midrash. After the tefilah, a respectable fellow approached and invited him to spend Shabbas with him. The Rav agreed and went with him to partake of the Shabbas-night meal. After the meal, before reciting Birkas HaMazon, the "ba'al habayis" (the master of the house, the host) informed his guest that they would recite Birkas HaMazon by the Rav of the city, because he was a holy man who hears Torah in the heavenly yeshivah above.

The "ba'al habayis" and his guest arrived at the home of the Rav of the city. The "ba'al habayis," who was an influential person in the community, sat down on the right side of the Rav. The author of the Ohr HaChaim, who was dressed very plainly, sat down at the end of the table. At the conclusion of the meal, prior to Birkas HaMazon, the Rav of the city became very spirited; it was time to abandon material concerns and his neshamah ascended (in a sort of trance). When he returned to himself, he began sharing the words of Torah that he had heard in the heavenly yeshivah. He presented 14 interpretations of the passuk "אם בחוקותי תלכו". He concluded by saying, "This is what the holy Rav, Rabbi Chaim ben Atar, said." The author of the Ohr HaChaim, who was extremely humble, and did not

believe that he deserved this title of honor, could not refrain, and said, "This is what Chaim ben Atar said."

The Rav of the city was outraged by the chutzpah of the guest. How dare he respond to what the Rav had heard in the heavenly yeshivah in the name of the holy Rabbi Chaim ben Atar, and refer to him simply as Chaim, without any title?! The "ba'al habayis" calmed the Rav of the city down and begged him to forgive the guest, since he was apparently a simple man. The Rav of the city calmed down, they recited Birkas HaMazon, and they went back to their home.

At the second meal, on Shabbas morning, it happened again. At the conclusion of their meal, the "ba'al habayis" and his guest went to the home of the Rav of the city. Once again, the Rav's neshamah ascended in a trance. When he returned to himself, he said that he heard in the heavenly yeshivah another fourteen novel interpretations of the passuk "אם בחוקותי". He concluded as he had on Shabbas night, "This is what the holy Rav, Rabbi Chaim ben Atar, said." Again, the guest repeated after him, "This is what Chaim ben Atar said." Once again, the Rav of the city became outraged at the guest's chutzpah. With great difficulty, the "ba'al habayis" calmed the Rav down, and he returned home with his guest.

After Seudah Shelishit, they went to the home of the Rav of the city once again. The same thing happened again. The Rav's neshamah ascended. When he woke up, he repeated fourteen new interpretations of the passuk "אם בחוקותי" he had heard in the heavenly yeshivah. He concluded by saying, "This is what the holy Rav, Rabbi Chaim ben Atar, said." Once again, the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh could not refrain, and he said, "This is what Chaim ben Atar said."

At this point, none of the efforts of the "ba'al habayis" succeeded in calming down the Rav. He could not forgive this simple Jew disparaging the kavod of the Torah of the holy **Rabbi Chaim ben Atar**, whose words of Torah were being said in the heavens in his name. Hence, he ordered his assistant to place the guest in the community jail, and after Shabbas, he would consider how to punish him for belittling a talmid-chacham.

On Motza'ei Shabbas, a strong wind picked up threatening to destroy all the houses of the city. Seeing that their lives were in peril, the members of the community fled to the Rav's house. As a man of G-d, they sought an explanation for this frightening storm that threatened their lives and their village. Why did HKB"H want to suddenly punish them?

The Rav made his neshamah ascend to inquire why this was happening. They answered him from heaven, "This is the punishment for having a holy man like **Rabbi Chaim ben Atar** imprisoned in your jail, and the Gehinnom cannot open up to enable the reshaim to return and complete their tikuns, so long as he is imprisoned. When you release him, the ruckus will quiet down." That is what happened.

Additionally, the powers that be in the heavens requested that the Rav of the city inform the esteemed guest, **Rabbi Chaim ben Atar**, that because he had been imprisoned there for several hours, he had already completed his sentence equivalent to one year of galus. He could now return home in good graces. The Rav released the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh with great kavod, and he returned to his city to study Torah and serve Hashem with kedushah and taharah.

### Exile Yourself to a Place of Torah

If we examine the 42 interpretations of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh on the passuk "אם בחוקותי תלכו", we find that the seventh interpretation alludes to a statement in the Mishnah (Avos 4, 18): "הוי גולה למקום—**exile yourself to a place of Torah**." He says that it is necessary to go from place to place to study Torah. This is the message inherent in the passuk: "אם בחוקותי"—in order to study Torah—"תלכו"—it is necessary to leave your place to find it, because when a person is at home, even if he has free time, he will be preoccupied with household chores. Therefore, he should leave his dwelling place to pursue the Torah.

Now, we learned from the incredible story above that the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh introduced 42 novel interpretations of the passuk "אם בחוקותי תלכו" while he was in galus. Thus, it is very likely that this is why he alluded to this matter in relation to this passuk—

that if a person truly desires to attain the wisdom and knowledge of the Torah, he must heed the advice of the Tanna: **"Exile yourself to a place of Torah."**

We find a similar teaching in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Mishlei 2, 932) related to the passuk (Mishlei 2, 4): **"אם תבקשנה ככסף וכמטמונים תחפשנה, אז תבין יראת ה' ודעת: 'אלקים תמצא'—if you seek it as you seek money, and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of Hashem, and discover the knowledge of G-d. Reish Lakish said: If a person does not pursue "divrei Torah," they will not pursue him. Similarly, Rabbi Nehorai says: Be exiled to a place of Torah; and if a person searches for them, as a result, he will merit wisdom and insight. Hence, it was said: "And discover the knowledge of G-d."**

Along these lines, the Shela hakadosh (Masei) writes with regards to the passuk (Bamidbar 33, 1): **"אלה מסעי בני ישראל וגו'—these are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael etc. The journeys are like exiles, and they afford atonement. Also, someone who moves his feet and transports himself to a place of Torah and goes to study, then his journey is ordained by Hashem. Therefore, the early sages would leave their homes to go study Torah; this was particularly true of Rashbi, his colleagues, and his students.**

### **The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh Introduced 42 Interpretations Prior to Chag HaShavuos Corresponding to the 42 Journeys in Galus**

I would now like to suggest a reason why it was orchestrated from above for the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh to introduce his 42 interpretations specifically in relation to parshas Bechukosai. As we learned from Rashi, the passuk **"אם בחוקתי תלכו"** urges us to devote ourselves to the study of Torah. Now, seeing as Ezra HaSofer arranged for this parsha to be read prior to Chag HaShavuos—so that the passing year will end along with its curses—therefore, the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh proposed 42 novel interpretations corresponding to the 42 journeys of Bnei Yisrael in the midbar after the exodus from Mitzrayim.

Let us refer to the opening passuk of parshas Masei **"אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאותם ביד משה"—these are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who departed the land of Mitzrayim, according to their legions, led by Moshe and Aharon.** In Likutei Torah, the Arizal teaches us: **Forty-two journeys are mentioned here; this is because Yisrael exited Mitzrayim via the power of the shem "mem-Beis" (the "42-letter name").** The Agra D'Kallah writes that this is alluded to in this passuk by the first letters of the words **מ'סעי ב'ני**, which are **"mem-Beis."** This is a reference to the name of 42 letters that we utter every morning in Shacharis in the tefilah of **"אנא בכח"**.

### **Every Jew Travels 42 Journeys in His Lifetime**

The Degel Machaneh Ephraim (Masei) presents in the name of his renowned elder the Ba'al Shem Tov hakadosh, zy"va, a fascinating concept. Every Jew, without exception, in the course of his lifetime, from the day of his birth until the day of his death, passes through the desolate wilderness of Olam HaZeh. In the process, he completes the very same forty-two journeys that Yisrael travelled in the midbar. Ultimately, he merits entering the land of the living in the world of the neshamos.

He compares the day a person is born and exits his mother's womb to **"yetzias Mitzrayim."** He then travels one journey after another until he reaches the upper **"eretz haChaim."** Undoubtedly, 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 transitions from journey to journey throughout his life.

Now, let us combine these two essential principles. Firstly, we learned from the Baal Shem Tov hakadosh that every Jew undertakes all forty-two journeys during his lifetime. Secondly, we learned from the Arizal and other kabbalists that the forty-two journeys correspond to the name of forty-two letters—**"shem mem-Beis."** Combining these two ideas, we can conclude that every one of us—from the day of our birth until the day of our passing, when a person returns his neshamah to the Creator—lives and

breathes the forty-two letters of "אנא בכח"—which represent the forty-two journeys a person travels during the course of his life.

We can expand on this notion by introducing the commentary of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh on the passuk "אלה מסעי". Why does the passuk emphasize their journeys--"מסעי"—without mentioning their encampments? He answers that the purpose of the journeys in the Midbar was to elevate the "nitzotzei kedushah"—the sparks of kedushah that had fallen into the clutches of the forces of tumah residing in the midbar, the dwelling-place of the "samech-mem." They are depicted in the Torah as follows (Devarim 8, 15): "המוליכך במדבר הגדול והגורא נחש שרף ועקרב וצמאון אשר: " **Who leads you through the great and awesome wilderness—snake, fiery serpent, and scorpion, and thirst where there was no water.** Therefore, the duration of their stays varied from location to location. In some places the work to refine and clarify the nitzotzot was more extensive, so they stayed there longer (up to a year); in other places, the work required was accomplished in a short period time (as little as twelve hours). Ultimately, with the completion of the forty-two journeys, Hashem's congregation extracted all of the holy sparks that the forces of tumah had swallowed up.

Understood in this light, it gives me great pleasure to explain the profound words of the Ba'al Shem Tov hakadosh, zy" a. The generation of the midbar

travelled 42 journeys in the wilderness corresponding to the "shem mem-Beis" to retrieve and refine all the "nitzotzei kedushah" from the forces of tumah and restore them to the realm of kedushah. In similar fashion, every Jew must travel 42 journeys during his lifetime. In each location, he must subjugate the forces of tumah and extract and clarify the sparks of kedushah via the "shem mem-Beis." Accordingly, HKB"H, the Grand Orchestrator, arranges for each Jew to remain in each location the amount of time necessary to accomplish the required tikun.

With the utmost deference, we can now understand why HKB"H arranged for the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh to be in galus specifically on parshas Bechukosai. Galus is associated with 42 journeys corresponding to the 42 journeys Yisrael made between the exodus from Mitzrayim until they entered the holy land. While in galus, he introduced 42 interpretations of the passuk: "אם בחוקתי תלכו". Additionally, HKB"H arranged for Ezra HaSofer to arrange the annual cycle of Torah-readings, so that parshas Bechukosai would always be read prior to Chag HaShavuot—so that the passing year would end along with its curses. Therefore, it was arranged for these 42 novel interpretations corresponding to the 42 journeys of galus to afford everyone who reads them atonement. Thus, they will enter the new year with a clean slate; the past year with its curses and punishments will be over. Amen. It should be His will!

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