

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

Prepared by
Rabbi Yehudah Leib Altein

Parshas Masei begins, "These are the journeys (*masei*) of Bnei Yisroel in which they left the land of Mitzrayim." The Torah then proceeds to list the forty-two stops made by the Jews, from when they left Mitzrayim until they reached the Yarden river near Yericho (*Yarden Yericho*).

The commentators ask a well-known question: The wording of the *possuk* ("*masei Bnei Yisroel* – the journeys of Bnei Yisroel," in the plural) makes it seem as if each of these stops entailed leaving the land of Mitzrayim. However, this is not the case. Once the Jews completed the first leg of their journey, going from Ramses to Sukkos, they were already out of Mitzrayim. The subsequent travels (from Sukkos until Yarden Yericho) seemingly had nothing to do with Mitzrayim!

DEFINING MERCHAV

Mitzrayim is related to the word *meitzar*, boundary. As stated numerous times in Sefer Shemos, the goal of Yetzias Mitzrayim was to reach *eretz tovah urechavah*—a good and expansive land. Eretz Yisroel represents *merchav*, breadth, the exact opposite of the constrictions of Mitzrayim.

What exactly is *meitzar* and *merchav*? These terms cannot be given absolute definitions. What is *merchav* for one person may be *meitzar* for another.

Let's take a person who is on a low level; his *nefesh ha'elokis* is exiled within his body and *nefesh habahamis*. If such a person undertakes to study a few extra minutes of Torah and think a little bit more into the meaning of the words of davening, he has already left his Mitzrayim and is in a state of *merchav*. But for someone who is on a higher level, these achievements are still *meitzar*. For him, to reach *merchav* he must accomplish much more.

What is *merchav* for one person may be *meitzar* for another.

What was Yetzias Mitzrayim yesterday is still Mitzrayim today, and we must leave those *meitzarim* for yet a higher *merchav*.

THE ONGOING JOURNEY

THE MITZRAYIM OF TODAY

This is one of the reasons we are instructed to mention Yetzias Mitzrayim on a daily basis.

When the Torah directs us to mention Yetzias Mitzrayim, the point is not simply to remember an event that took place thousands of years ago. The idea is to *relive* Yetzias Mitzrayim, as the Mishnah states, "One must view it as if *he himself* has left Mitzrayim."

What does it mean to relive Yetzias Mitzrayim each day?

Yetzias Mitzrayim means to break free from our boundaries and constrictions. This is a daily *avodah*. If we left our constraints on Sunday, that is not enough for Monday. Since we must constantly strive for higher levels, what was Yetzias Mitzrayim yesterday is still Mitzrayim today, and we must leave those *meitzarim* for yet a higher *merchav*.

"IT'S ALREADY MORNING!"

This can help us understand the story mentioned in the *haggadah*: "R. Eliezer, R. Yehoshua, R. Elazar ben Azariah, R. Akiva, and R. Tarfon were once reclining in Bnei Brak. They recounted the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim the entire night, until their students arrived and told them, 'Our masters, it is time to read the morning *Shema*!'"

These five sages were obviously on a higher level than their students. From their perspective, they felt that it was still "night"—they were still in Mitzrayim. Therefore, they recounted—*mesaprim*—the story

of Yetzias Mitzrayim. The word *mesaprim* is related to the term *even sapir*, brightness: they worked on illuminating the darkness, to leave this level of Mitzrayim.

For the students, however, their masters' "darkness" appeared



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as light; for them it was already "morning." What was bright for the students appeared dark to their masters, and they felt it was still necessary to work on leaving Mitzrayim.

THE FINAL STOP

We can now understand why the *possuk* says *masei* in the plural—"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisroel in which they left the land of Mitzrayim."

Indeed, as far as the *physical land* of Mitzrayim was concerned, as soon as they left Ramses for Sukkos, they were out of Mitzrayim. However, when it came to the *inner meaning* of Mitzrayim, namely, boundaries and limitations, the journey was far from over. As long as they had not yet reached *eretz tovah urechavah*, they were still in the process of leaving Mitzrayim.

Eretz Yisroel symbolizes the times of Moshiach. This is alluded to in the Jews' final stop, Yarden Yericho. *Yericho* is related to the word *rei'ach*, smell, which is associated with Moshiach, who will judge using the sense of smell.

We might be striving higher and higher, achieving ever greater heights. However, as long as we have not yet reached Moshiach, it is a sign that things are not as they should be, and we are still in Mitzrayim.

FORTY-TWO IN ONE GO

This is one of the reasons for our custom to read all forty-two travels in one *aliyah*. This is the case not only on Shabbos, but on Monday and Thursday too: For Kohen we read the first three *pesukim*, and for Levi we proceed to read from the first journey until the last.

We might think that since yesterday we left what was considered then Mitzrayim, we can stop where we are. This *minhag* hints to us that we cannot stop in the middle. We must continue to travel further and further, until we reach the final stop—Yarden Yericho.

There are two lessons to be learned here. Someone might feel that he is on a high level, and there is no need for him to go further. Parshas Masei teaches us that this is not correct; however great a person may be, as long as he has not reached Yarden Yericho, he is still in Mitzrayim.

Conversely, there may be someone who is still at the beginning of the journey—or perhaps he has yet to begin. He may think: "I have such a long journey ahead of me. How will I ever get anywhere?!" He must know that all he needs to do is take the first step, and Hashem will help him reach higher and higher, until he reaches the final destination.

A person may look at his low state and ask: "Who am I, and what can I accomplish?" However, the Rambam rules that we must view the world as hanging in a perfect balance, and even one action can tip the scale and bring salvation to the entire world. Even someone on a low level can accomplish—and not just a little bit, but something that will continue further and further, until the coming of Moshiach.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 2, pp. 348ff. *Ibid.*, p. 540.

We might be striving higher and higher; however, as long as we have not reached Moshiach, things are not as they should be.



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info@merkazanash.com
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