

פרשת מטות

It has probably been an issue for as long as there have been legal systems. Perhaps, it is a conflict that is inherent in the very nature of human beings. And, it is addressed in this week's Parshas Mattos if we want to examine the apparent 'philosophy' of a series of Halachos that, on the surface, do not seem to be related.

What is the issue and what is the series of Halachos that may impact on the issue?

The issue may be termed 'regimentation vs. individualization'. The activity of law is to regulate, to prescribe particular required behaviors and to proscribe other behaviors. Because law is a 'system', it applies across the board to a wide and inclusive group of individuals. In a human legal system, all individuals are joined together bound by the same laws.

In the Torah legal system, all are also bound by the same laws. The distinction between the human legal system and the Torah legal system is found in the nature of the judge.

In a human legal system the judge, even if he has a certain amount of leeway, cannot exempt a person from the rule of law because of unique and extenuating circumstances. In the Torah system, the flesh and blood *Dayan* is no less limited. However, since there is the ultimate Judge in the Torah system, then, ultimately, He can judge a person individually and will take into account all of the circumstances.

That is the gist of what the Mishnah in Masseches Rosh Hashanah (Perek 1/Mishnah 2) teaches. It writes:

בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון שנאמר (תהלים לג/טו) היוצר יחד לבם המבין אל כל מעשיהם :

On Rosh Hashanah all who enter in the world pass before Him as sheep [enter the corral one by one] as it says, "He creates their heart together; He understands all of their deeds.'

Tiferes Yisroel writes in his commentary there:

המבין וכו'. אקרא דלעיל קאי, דכתיב המשגיח על כל יושבי ארץ, והיוצר אף על גב שמשגיח על כולם ועל לבם יחד בהשקפה אחת אפילו הכי מבין אל כל מעשה ומעשה שלהן:

The verse 'He understands' continues the prior verse that reads: 'He watches over all of the inhabitants of the land'¹. The Creator, even though He watches over all of them and He created their heart together with one overview, even so, He understands each of the actions of each and every one of them.

Among the message that the Mishnah gives is that Hashem pays attention to everyone individually.

However, since people are not always fully conscious of Divine Providence, even though they believe in it, their common perception is that each person is forced to fit into a particular pattern and that pattern is limiting and prevents expression of one's uniqueness.

In fact, such a concern, and seemingly its justification, was already expressed by Rambam in Hilchos Tefila.

In the beginning of Hilchos Tefila, with its particular focus on the *Amida*, not prayer in general, Rambam teaches us the basic format of the Amida. He writes (Perek 1/Halachos 3-4):

אם היה רגיל מרבה בתחנה ובקשה ואם היה ערל שפתים מדבר כפי יכלתו ובכל עת שירצה, וכן מנין התפלות כל אחד כפי יכלתו, יש מתפלל פעם אחת ביום, ויש מתפללין פעמים הרבה...וכן היה הדבר תמיד ממשה רבינו ועד עזרא.

[Originally] a person who was accustomed would say many supplications and requests and one who was unable to speak well would say [the prayer] according to his ability and when he wished. Similarly [originally] the

¹ The verse reads:

ממכון שבתו השגיח אל כל יושבי הארץ:

From the place of His dwelling, He watches all of the inhabitants of the land.

number of times that a person would pray daily would be according to his ability. Some would say the Amida once a day and others would say it many times a day...So was it from the time of Moshe Rabbenu until Ezra.

כיון שגלו ישראל בימי נבוכדנצר הרשע נתערבו בפרס ויון ושאר האומות ונולדו להם בנים בארצות הגוים ואותן הבנים נתבלבלו שפתם והיתה שפת כל אחד ואחד מעורבת מלשונות הרבה וכיון שהיה מדבר אינו יכול לדבר כל צורכו בלשון אחת אלא בשיבוש...ומפני זה כשהיה אחד מהן מתפלל תקצר לשונו לשאול חפציו או להגיד שבח הקדוש ברוך הוא בלשון הקדש עד שיערבו עמה לשונות אחרות, וכיון שראה עזרא ובית דינו כך עמדו ותקנו להם שמנה עשרה ברכות על הסדר...כדי שיהיו ערוכות בפי הכל וילמדו אותן ותהיה תפלת אלו העלגים תפלה שלימה כתפלת בעלי הלשון הצחה, ומפני ענין זה תקנו כל הברכות והתפלות מסודרות בפי כל ישראל.

When Israel was exiled in the days of the wicked Nevuchadnetzar and they became intermingled with Persia, Greece and the other nations and they had children in the lands of the nations, the language of those children became confused and the speech of everyone was mixed with many other languages. When a person spoke they could not give full expression in one language, but made mistakes.

Because of this, when one would pray, he was unable to make his request or to give praise to Hashem in *L'shon Hakodesh* without the interjection of many other languages. When Ezra and his court saw this, they arose and enacted 18 blessings in a particular order...so that the prayers would be arranged for all and they could learn them and the prayer of those whose language was limited would be as complete as that of the one who had clear expression.

It is because of this that they established the blessings and the prayers to be arranged comfortably in the mouth of every Jew.

It is true that even with this regimented prayer there is room for personal expression. Shulchan Aruch writes (Siman 119/s'if 1):

אם רצה להוסיף בכל ברכה מהאמצעית, מעין הברכה, מוסיף. כיצד, היה לו חולה מבקש עליו רחמים בברכת רפאנו; היה צריך פרנסה, מבקש עליה בברכת השנים... ובשומע תפלה יכול לשאול כל צרכיו, שהיא כוללת כל הבקשות...

If one wishes to add in any of the middle blessings [of request] that which is similar in content to that blessing, he may add. For example-if he has someone who is ill, he may ask for Divine mercy in the blessing of 'Heal us'; if he is seeking income, he may request it in the blessing for agriculture.

In the blessing of 'He hears prayer' he is able to request all of his needs because that is a blessing that is inclusive of all requests.

Here, too, there is room for individuality, but it is limited. One is not allowed to add onto the first three Blessings of Praise or the last three Blessings of Thanksgiving; their text does not allow for deviation.

Can an individual ever make his or her own mark? Can they do something completely independently, that which is not already fixed, whether fully or partially?

That is where our Parsha enters the discussion as we are instructed about the laws of *nedarim* and *sh'vuos*.

Let us allow the Rambam to provide us with a short introduction as he writes (Hilchos Nedarim Perek 1/Halachos 1-2):

הנדר נחלק לשתי מחלוקות, החלק הראשון הוא שיאסור על עצמו דברים המותרים לו כגון שיאמר פירות מדינה פלונית אסורין עלי כל שלשים יום או לעולם...ועל זה נאמר בתורה לאסור אסר על נפשו, שיאסור על עצמו דברים המותרים...וחלק זה הוא שאני קורא אותו נדרי איסר.

The oath is divided into two categories. The first category is that a person forbids for himself that which is [Halachically] permissible for him. For example-if a person would say, 'The fruit of this particular country is forbidden for me for 30 days or forever...Regarding this, the Torah writes, 'to place a prohibition upon himself'. He forbids himself that which is [otherwise] allowed.

I call this category *Oaths of Prohibition*.

והחלק השני הוא שיחייב עצמו בקרבן שאינו חייב בו, כגון שיאמר הרי עלי להביא עולה... וחלק זה הוא שאני קורא אותו נדרי הקדש.

The second category is that a person obligates himself to bring a *Korban* for which he is not obligated. For example, if he will say, 'I take it upon myself to bring a *Korban Oloh*-burnt offering. I call this category *Oaths of Sanctification*.

If one takes into account the various types of *nedarim* and *sh'vuos*, oaths and vows, disregarding those that refer to *Korbonos*, he will find that three Massechtos of *Shas*, *Nedorim*, *Nozir* and *Sh'vuos* all deal with these Halachos and that which stems from them, providing us with a detailed and regimented system.

Yet, despite the fact that they system is detailed and regimented, there is an open opportunity for the individual find his opening in these Halachos.

The Torah allows a person to express himself by virtue of making a vow or an oath. A person can forbid an object to himself by making an oath or can obligate himself to undertake an action or refrain from one by making a vow².

² The distinction between the English rendering of *neder* and *sh'vua* as oath and vow, respectively, is not particularly clear. Their definitions appear synonymous.

In Halachah, however, the definitions of *neder* and *sh'vua* are different and the Halachos surrounding them are distinctive.

This is what the Gemara in Masseches Nedarim (2 b) writes:

נדרים דמיתסר חפצא עליה... שבועה דקאסר נפשיה מן חפצא.
A *neder* makes an object forbidden to a person; a *sh'vua* prohibits a person from the object.

That is, the focus of the *neder* is the object-this permissible fruit is now a forbidden fruit.

The focus of the *sh'vua* is the person-'I will eat this fruit' or 'I will not eat this fruit'.

If a person wants to go on a diet, let us say, he can make a *sh'vua*. 'I will not eat ice cream for the next seven days' can be the content of his promise. Or, he can say, 'Ice cream is forbidden to me.'

If a person wishes to be more charitable he can say, 'I will give one shekel a day for the next 30 days' and if he wishes to be more athletic he can vow, 'I will swim 10 laps a day for the next year'.

The vows and oaths can be positive or negative, of great objective significance or little. They can express what a person wishes to do, to accomplish or to avoid.

That is the power of the word that the Torah imbues within us.

However, the question can be raised: If I want to give more Tzedaka, why not just give the Tzedaka? Why should I make a *sh'vua*?

If I want to stay away from ice cream, let me stay away from ice cream. Why do I need to employ a *neder* to forbid the ice cream to me?

Perhaps, this is the crux of the matter. Is the personal aspect that I wish to emphasize, is the trait of my individuality that I wish to express a true expression of who- I am or is it a particular whim that is a momentary phenomenon?

We find this very issue in Chazal and in Halachah regarding an activity which is not optional. The context of the issue is whether taking an oath – a *Sh'vua* - about which one is already obligated, is that meaningful or not. Is there any consequence to pledging yourself to do an action that G-d has already commanded?

One who wishes to make such a pledge is confronted by a problem. Every Jew is called *מושבב ועומד מהר סיני*. At Sinai every Jew was administered an oath to keep the Torah. If that oath was meaningful to the individual who wants to make a second oath regarding that for which he was already obligated, what need is there to take an additional oath? If the oath taken at Sinai was not meaningful, what good does another one do?

We read in Masseches Nedarim (8 a):

ואמר רב גידל אמר רב מנין שנשבעין לקיים את המצוה? שנאמר: (תהילים קיט/טו) נשבעתי ואקיימה לשמור משפטי צדקך. והלא מושבע ועומד מהר סיני הוא! אלא הא קא משמע לן, דשרי ליה לאיניש לזרוזי נפשיה. ואמר רב גידל אמר רב: האומר אשכים ואשנה פרק זה, אשנה מסכתא זו - נדר גדול נדר לא...ל"קי ישראל. והלא מושבע ועומד הוא, ואין שבועה חלה על שבועה! מאי קא משמע לן? דאפילו זרוזי בעלמא, היינו דרב גידל קמייתא! הא קא משמע לן, כיון דאי בעי פטר נפשיה בקרית שמע שחרית וערבית, משום הכי חייל שבועה עליה.

Rav Gidel said in the name of Rav: What is the source that teaches that one can take a *sh'vua* to fulfill a Mitzvah? It is written, "I have sworn and I will fulfill it to guard your righteous laws. [What good is such an oath], wasn't he already sworn to observe Mitzvos on Mt. Sinai? This comes to teach us that it is permissible for one to make a vow to encourage himself.

Rav Gidel further said in the name of Rav: If one says I will arise early and learn this chapter, review this Masseches-he has made a great and important oath to the G-d of Israel. [What good is such an oath], wasn't he already sworn to observe Mitzvos on Mt. Sinai? If this comes to teach us that it is permissible for one to make a vow just to encourage himself, Rav Gidel already taught us this in the first quotation. What does this second teaching come to teach us? [What good is such an oath], wasn't he already sworn to observe Mitzvos on Mt. Sinai? A *sh'vua* cannot take effect on a previously made *sh'vua*.

[The answer is] that since a person could have exempted himself [to fulfill the Mitzvah of Torah study] by reciting *Shema* in the morning and the evening, therefore this oath [to learn beyond the minimum requirement] is valid [because it extends beyond that which was promised at Sinai.]

Chazal teach us two ideas here regarding the use of oaths for holy purposes. First we are taught that they can be used to expedite one's Mitzvah performance. If a person needs a push to fulfill even the minimum level of the Mitzvah, that is proper.

The second idea is for one who wants to do more than the minimum, one who doesn't want 'just to get by'. At Sinai we were not required to do the maximum- we were required to basically fulfill Mitzvos³. If one chooses not to be satisfied with such a level, his oath is of a different quality. That is why Rav Gidel says

נדר גדול נדר לא...לקי ישראל.

He has made a great and important oath to the G-d of Israel.

When a person chooses to express himself in such a way, to add to the dedication that he is required, not to perform Mitzvos only because he was commanded, but because he wants to as well, that is a clear demonstration of dedication to the G-d of Israel.

However, the question that arose earlier is relevant here as well. If he wishes to do a Mitzvah about which he is lax, let him motivate himself and do it. If he wishes to do more than the minimum of Torah study that is required, let him learn more. Why take a neder? Why utter a sh'vua?

Of course, it is true that the purpose of making a neder or a sh'vua in these circumstances is that he feels that he cannot overcome his laxness. He feels that without an external boost he will not reach his goal. That is what the Gemara writes:

דשרי ליה לאיניש לזרוזי נפשיה.

It is permissible for one to make a vow to encourage himself.

³ For more information regarding a 'minimum' of learning Torah despite the fact that the Posuk (Yehoshua Perek 1/Posuk 8) reads:

לא ימוש ספר התורה הזו מפיה והגית בו יומם ולילה למען תשמר לעשות ככל הכתוב בו כי אז תצליח את דרכך ואז תשכיל:

This Sefer Torah shall not depart from your mouth and you shall think about it day and night in order that you will observe to do all that is written in it because then your path will be successful and you will be wise.

See Masseches Menachos 99 b and the commentaries there.

However, even this is not sufficient. There is a price that he pays when in order to 'encourage himself' he takes a neder or utters a sh'vua.

There is a tremendous price to pay when one obligates himself with a neder or a sh'vua. The price is the prohibition that accompanies the lack of fulfillment of the neder or sh'vua.

The Torah writes in our Parsha (B'midbar Perek 30/Posuk 3):

אִישׁ כִּי יִדַּר נֶדֶר לֵה' אוֹ הִשָּׁבַע שְׁבַע לְאַסֹּר אֶסֶר עַל נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ כְּכֹל הַיֵּצֵא
מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה:

When a person makes an oath to Hashem or utters a vow to forbid something for himself, he should not profane his word; according to all that comes out from his mouth he should do.

The Torah writes that there are both a Mitzvas Aseh, an obligation to fulfill his word and a Mitzvas Lo Sa'aseh, a prohibition against violating the commitment that he has taken upon himself in this manner.

Not only are there two Mitzvos involved, but the Torah expressed itself regarding the nature of the violation of one who does not fulfill his vow:

לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ

He should not profane his word.

The clear implication of the term 'profane' is that one's word is sanctified. Just like a violation of sanctity is profanation, so when the Torah writes here regarding profanation, we understand that a person's word is holy.

We learn, therefore, that a person's expression of individual preference in the form of an oath or a vow becomes a permanent part of one's will and goals in life. It is his personal expression that sanctifies him.

To give a trivial example first, a person may choose vanilla ice cream when offered multiple flavors because he likes vanilla and doesn't like the others.

Such a choice is an expression of personal preference. We would find it absurd for him to make a vow that he will only eat vanilla.

We would find it absurd because making an oath or a vow is a definition of a personal value that one wishes to make permanent and inviolable. Even if such an oath or vow is given a time limit, i.e. he would say, I vow to eat vanilla only for the next 30 days, we would still look askance at the person. An oath or a vow gives expression to your hopes and aspirations; it should not be relevant to something trivial.

You may like something and prefer it and choose, but that is not the same as making a vow or an oath.

But, it is not only triviality which is improper for an oath. Let us say that a woman has decided to daven Maariv nightly. Women are exempt from davening Maariv⁴. Now it is certainly respectable for a woman to daven Maariv and undoubtedly she has *s'char Mitzvah* for its recitation.

However, there is a difference between a woman who has decided to daven Maariv⁵ and one who makes a vow to do so.

The desire for *Avodas Hashem* needs no justification. It is neither trivial nor unimportant. But, since there are other avenues of such service, an interest in davening Maariv should not be transformed into a neder unless a woman would feel that this is a permanent expression of who she is, of who she wishes to be.

If there is not such a deep commitment, then the words of Koheles (Perek 5/P'sukim 3-4) should be heeded:

⁴ Mishnah B'rurah writes in Siman 106 (s'if koton 4):

תפלת ערבית שהוא רשות אף על פי שעכשיו כבר קבלוהו עליהם כל ישראל לחובה מכל מקום הנשים לא קבלו עליהם ורובן אין מתפללין ערבית.

The recitation of the Amida of Maariv is optional and even though now all of Israel has accepted its recitation as obligatory, women did not accept it upon themselves and most women do not daven Maariv.

⁵ Our discussion here does not focus on the specifics of the Laws of Nedarim, particularly in this case where repetitive fulfillment of an optional act may be considered as binding as a neder.

כְּאֲשֶׁר תִּדְרֹךְ נֶדֶר יֵאָדָּר...לִיקִים אֶל תִּאֲחָר לְשִׁלְמוֹ כִּי אִין חִפְץ בְּכִסְיִים אֶת אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרֹךְ
שְׁלָם: טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִדְרֹךְ מִשִּׁתְּדוֹר וְלֹא תִשְׁלָם:

When you make an oath to G-d do not delay in its fulfillment⁶; G-d has no desire for fools; that oath which you stated, fulfill. It is better not to make an oath than to make an oath and not to fulfill it.

Why does Koheles term this errant oath-taker as a fool? Let him term him as a 'sinner' or as 'wicked'. What does the term 'fool' teach?

Koheles is teaching us that beyond the Halachic aspects of *nedarim* and *sh'vuos* there is an underlying nature of personal integrity. Taking an oath is putting one's integrity on the line. It is a statement that 'this is who I am' or 'this is who I wish to be'.

Taking an oath or a vow is not a declaration of 'this is what I wish to do today' or this is what I feel like doing today'. These statements are reflections of one's feelings and may be perfectly legitimate. However, the oath that the Torah allows me to make expects more from me. It expects the oath to be a result of introspection, deep thought and consideration and careful deliberation. If one makes an oath or takes a vow without the introspection, thought, consideration and deliberation, then Koheles *paskens* - he is a fool!

This approach allows us to understand the tension that exists regarding a very specific type of *neder* – the *neder* of *nezirus*.

We are likely familiar with the two approaches that Chazal teach us ⁷. One approach sees the *nozir* as being holy. The Torah says about him that very phrase, as we read (B'midbar Perek 6/Posuk 5):

כָּל יְמֵי נֶדֶר נִזְרוֹ תִעָרֵךְ לֹא יַעֲבֹר עַל רֵאשׁוֹ עַד מְלֵאת הַיָּמִם אֲשֶׁר יִזְיֵר לֵהּ קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה
גִּדְל פְּרַע שְׂעָר רֵאשׁוֹ:

⁶ The term **תשלם** used in this verse in various forms means 'pay'. Since the root of the word *shalem* means 'complete', 'fulfill' is an appropriate translation particularly in this case since a *neder* can include far more than obligations of payment.

⁷ See Masseches Nozir 3 a.

All the days of the vow of his *n'zirus*, a razor shall not go on his head until the days that he vowed to G-d are fulfilled; he shall be holy, his hair shall grow wild.

The other opinion points out that the Torah says that the *nozir* must bring a sin-offering as we read (ibid. P'sukim 13-14) regarding the *nozir* who has fulfilled his vow according to the letter of the law:

וְזֹאת תֹּרַת הַנִּזְיָר בְּיוֹם מְלֵאת יָמָיו נִזְרוּ יָבִיֵא אֹתוֹ אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: וְהִקְרִיב אֶת
קָרְבָּנוֹ לַה' כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן שָׁנָתוֹ תְּמִים אֶחָד לְעֵלָה וְכִבְשָׂה אֶחָת בֵּת שָׁנָתָה תְּמִימָה לְחֻטָּאת
וְאֵיל אֶחָד תְּמִים לְשִׁלְמִים:

This is the law of the *nozir* on the day when he has completed the days of his *nozir*-vow; he shall bring him to the opening of the Ohel Moed. He shall offer his *korbon* to G-d, a one-year old unblemished sheep for a burnt-offering and a one-year old unblemished ewe as a sin-offering and an unblemished ram for a *shlomim*-offering.

Now, it would seem difficult to understand why a *nozir* could be considered a sinner when we hear the motivation for his vow from the Torah itself.

Rashi wrote earlier in this section (Posuk 2) when the Torah teaches the law of the *Sotah*, suspected adulteress, immediately followed by the laws of *nozir*:

למה נסמכה פרשת נזיר לפרשת סוטה לומר לך שכל הרואה סוטה בקלקולה יזיר
עצמו מן היין, שהוא מביא לידי ניאוף:

Why was the section dealing with the laws of *nozir* placed after the section dealing with the laws of *sotah*? [It was done so] to tell you that anyone who sees the *Sotah* in her ruination will forswear himself from wine because wine brings to a situation of promiscuity.

This seems like a wonderful justification for taking the oath of *nezirus*, why could there be an objection?

Furthermore, when the Torah introduces us to the laws of *nozir* it wrote (Posuk 2):

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּי יִפְלֵא לְנֹדֵר נֹדֵר נָזִיר לְהִזְיֵר לָהּ:

Speak to B'nei Yisroel and you shall say to them, 'A man or a woman who will separate themselves to make a vow of *nezirus* to become a *nozir* to Hashem.

Rashi writes there:

להזיר לה' - להבדיל עצמו מן היין לשם שמים:

To be a nozir for Hashem-to separate himself from wine for the sake of Heaven.

What more can we ask? Isn't this person righteous? The Torah is testifying that his act is לשם שמים.

However, in fact, it seems like there are two types of Nozir, one who has made a life-commitment, and is thus praiseworthy and one who is acting spontaneously, on the spur of the moment. The latter may certainly be sincere at that moment but there has been no understanding, consideration, deliberation or life-long commitment.

This dichotomy was already expressed by Shimon HaTzaddik⁸ in Masseches Nozir (4 b) who answered our question. We read:

אמר שמעון הצדיק: מימי לא אכלתי אשם נזיר טמא חוץ מאדם אחד, שבא אלי מן הדרום יפה עינים וטוב רואי וקווצותיו סדורות לו תלתלים, אמרתי לו: בני, מה ראית לשחת שער נאה זה? אמר לי: רועה הייתי לאבי בעירי, והלכתי לשאוב מים מן המעיין ונסתכלתי בבבואה שלי, ופחז יצרי עלי וביקש לטורדני מן העולם, אמרתי לו: ריקה! מפני מה אתה מתגאה בעולם שאינו שלך, שסופך להיות רמה ותולעה? העבודה, שאגלחך לשמו! עמדתי ונשקתיו על ראשו, אמרתי לו: כמותך ירבו נזירים בישראל, עליך הכתוב אומר: איש כי יפליא לנדור נדר נזיר להזיר לה':

⁸ Shimon HaTzaddik is the first sage mentioned in Masseches Ovot (Perek 1/Mishnah 1). He was the Kohen Godol and, like all Kohanim, was eligible to eat from *Kodshei Kodoshim*, the offerings of *Chattot* and *Osham*.

Shimon HaTzaddik said, “In all of my life I only ate from one *asham*-guilt offering⁹ of a Nozir¹⁰. This one person came from the south and had beautiful eyes and was good-looking and had beautifully arranged locks of hair. [He was a *nozir* and became impure and now had to cut his beautiful hair.] I said to him, ‘My son, why did you see fit to destroy this nice hair?’ He said to me, ‘I was a shepherd for my father in my city. I went to draw water from the spring and I looked at my reflection and my *yetzer* took hold of me and wanted [me to do actions that would] take me out of the world [to come]. I said to my reflection, “Empty one! Why are you so conceited about yourself in a world that isn’t yours? At the end you will be with the worms and insects [when you die]. I take an oath that I will cut it for His Name.’ Shimon HaTzaddik continued, ‘I stood and I kissed him on his head and I said to him, ‘There should be many *nezirim* like you in Israel. About you the Torah says, ‘A man...who will separate himself to make a vow of *nezirus* to become a *nozir* to Hashem.’

In his commentary to the Gemara there, Rabbenu Yona explains that most *nezirim* who became *tomei* and had to repeat the *nazir* period, sometimes many times, would often regret making the oath of *nezirus* thereby bringing into question the validity of their neder. If there was a question regarding the validity of their neder, then the korbonos that they brought may have had a question regarding them. If he expressed regret regarding making his oath of *nezirus*, maybe he would no longer be an *nozir* and his offerings, that were to be brought by a valid *nozir* could no longer be offered.

Thus, Shimon HaTzaddik refrained from eating an animal that was offered as a Korbon but might have had a question mark on it.

⁹ A *oshom*-guilt offering was only brought by the *nozir* when he became *tomei* before he fulfilled his oath of *nezirus*. Thus, we understand that not only were many people *nezirim*, many of those became *tomei* prior to fulfilling the oath. When a *nozir* becomes *tomei* prior to fulfilling his oath, he must begin his *nezirus* from the beginning. That is what the Torah writes here in Posuk 12.

¹⁰ Shimon HaTzaddik live at the time of the building of the second Beis HaMikdosh. It seems, based on his testimony, that many people were *nezirim*.

We see that Shimon HaTzaddik saw that many people became nezirim because of an initial sense of taking action, of doing something that they thought was right. He did not question their sincerity.

What Shimon HaTzaddik did say was that the vast majority of nezirim were not classified as

להזיר לה'

To be a nozir for the sake of Heaven.

If they were sincere, why was their *nezirus* not considered לשם שמים? The answer is that *nezirus* is a commitment. A commitment is not measured by a one-time thought or emotion. It has to be long term.

It seems that this is the point that Or HaChaim HaKodosh had in mind in this commentary at the beginning of our Parsha. Or HaChaim comments on the doubling of terms להזיר נזיר, when it seems that the Torah could have written נזיר. He also comments about the two expressions of speech in the verse, דבר and ואמרת¹¹. He writes that the repetitive expressions reflect the higher level of *nezirus*, the one that Shimon HaTzaddik praised. ואמרת, as a more pleasant expression of speech refers to the higher level of *nezirus*, whereas דבר, a harsher expression for speech, refers to the lower level.

We therefore see that, according to Or HaChaim at least, there are two levels of *nezirus* reflecting the sincerity and permanence of the commitment that the *nozir* makes when he volunteers to take the *nezirus* upon himself.

One may ask, if the Torah demands such a complete and total commitment, not an expression of a whim, if it demands understanding and deliberation, why, then, does the Torah allow a vow or an oath, a regular *neder*, of a *neder* of *nezirus* or *sh'vua* to be released by a *Chacham*.

Rashi comments on the opening verse of our Parsha. We read:

¹¹ We note that use of דבר and ואמרת in one verse is not exclusive to this verse. We see it in B'midbar Perek 15/Posuk 38. See the Or HaChaim there as well who comments on this change.

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רְאֵשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה':

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of B'nei Yisroel saying, 'This is the matter that Hashem has commanded.

Since Moshe spoke to Israel many times and this is the only time that the 'heads of the tribes' are mentioned, Rashi comments:

ראשי המטות - חלק כבוד לנשיאים ללמדם תחלה ואחר כך לכל בני ישראל. ומנין שאף שאר הדברות כן, תלמוד לומר (שמות לד/לא - לב¹²) וישבו אליו אהרן וכל הנשיאים בעדה וידבר משה אליהם ואחרי כן נגשו כל בני ישראל.

The heads of the tribes-Moshe honored the princes by teaching them first and then he taught all of Israel. How do we know [that this sequence was not limited to this particular case of vows] but that he taught the same way with all the other times he spoke? That is what the verses teach, 'Aharon and all of the princes of the congregation returned to Moshe and Moshe spoke to them and afterwards all of B'nei Yisroel approached.

Rashi questions the reason why the Torah chose to mention the heads of the tribes at the beginning of our Parsha since they were part and parcel of every instruction that Moshe gave. Rashi writes:

ומה ראה לאומרה כאן, למד שהפרת נדרים ביחיד מומחה

Why did the Torah see fit to mention them here? This teaches that *nedarim* can be annulled by a single acknowledged authority¹³.

¹² The verses read in their entirety:

וַיִּקְרָא אֵלֵיהֶם מֹשֶׁה וַיָּשְׁבוּ אֵלָיו אֶהְרֹן וְכָל הַנְּשִׂאִים בְּעֵדָה וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵיהֶם: וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן נִגְּשׁוּ כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּצְוֶם אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֵתוֹ בְּהַר סִינַי:

Moshe called to them an Aharon and all of the princes of the congregation returned to Moshe and Moshe spoke to them and afterwards all of B'nei Yisroel approached. Afterwards, all of B'nei Yisroel approached and Moshe commanded them about all that Hashem spoke to him on Mt. Sinai.

The fact that this *mumcheh*, acknowledged authoritative Talmid Chacham, can annul vows and oaths seems to present a problem for the thesis that the commitment required of a neder or sh'vua is only arrived at after contemplation and conviction. Since the vow or oath can be overturned, this lessens its inviolability.

I think that the answer to this question is found in an explanation of Or HaChaim on our Parsha.

Or HaChaim questions why the Torah does not write explicitly that the מומחה, authority, is able to annul vows and oaths. This is a basic Halachah; should it not be given due prominence?

The fact that this Halachah is not given prominence is the subject of a Mishnah in Masseches Chagiga (10 b):

היתר נדרים פורחין באויר ואין להם על מה שיסמכו.

The laws of annulling oaths are 'flying in the air' and do not have [a clear source in the Written Torah] upon which to be based.

Rashi explains this Mishnah which is unintelligible as translated. He writes:

היתר נדרים פורחים באויר - התרת נדרים שאמרו חכמים, שהחכם מתיר את הנדר - מעט רמז יש במקרא, ואין על מה לסמוך, אלא שכן מסור לחכמים בתורה שבעל פה.

The laws of annulling oaths are flying in the air-That which Chazal said that a Chacham can annul an oath has only a little hint in the Torah and there is

¹³ Rashi continues:

ואם אין יחיד מומחה מפר בשלשה הדיוטות.

If there is no authority, then three non-authoritative people can annul the vow.

nothing upon which to be based in Torah Shebichsav. Rather, such was transmitted to Chazal in the Oral Torah.

‘Why is it so, asks Or HaChaim? Why did the Torah choose to teach us the law of the annulment of oaths by the *mumcheh*-authority with the most fragile of hints?

He answers:

אכן הטעם הוא כי לא רצה ה' שיהיה כתוב לעין כל אדם שהנדר והשבועה ישנה
בהיתר שבזה יזלזלו בנדרים ובשבועות, ולזה נתחכם ה' והעלים הדבר ומסר
ההתר לגדולי ישראל... אבל בפני כל ההמון יהיו נעולי דלת לקיים כל נדר וכל
שבועה...

In fact, the reason is that Hashem did not want this law of the *mumcheh* being able to annul oaths and vows to be visible to all so that people would not treat *nedarim* and *sh'vuos* lightly. Thus, Hashem in His wisdom hid this law but gave the permission to the Gedolei Yisroel.

But for the masses, they should think that ‘the door is locked’ [and that they have no choice but] to fulfill every oath and every vow.

The point is clear. Personal expression through oaths and vows should not be transient and not done on the spur of the moment. They are to reflect unwavering commitment.

If someone doesn't have such a commitment, they must refrain from making a *neder* or *sh'vua*.

However, if the Torah wants a person to follow through on his commitment and not waver from his dedication to this contemplated and deliberated decision, why did it create a mechanism to annul *nedarim* and *sh'vuos*? The Torah did not create a mechanism to allow Shabbos desecration post-facto, why should there be one for oaths and vows?

I think that the explanation can be derived in an answer that we may posit for a question that Shem MiShmuel asks.

Shem MiShmuel (Parshas Mattos 5673 d.h. vayedaber) says in the name of his father the Avnei Nezer that by introducing the laws of oaths with the ראשי המטות, the heads of the tribes, the implication is that they are the center-piece of these laws. But in fact, they are not central to these laws whatsoever. A person can make an oath and never deal with the *mumcheh*-authority if he fulfills the oath. He only deals with the authority when there is an issue. If so, why allow the aspect of annulment by the authority to 'headline' these laws¹⁴?

I think that the answer is that it is *davka* the allowance of annulment that enabled the laws of oaths and vows to be enacted. The necessity for commitment and dedication is mediated by the frailty of man. The results of deliberation and sincerity are often met with a sense that, despite it all, one did not think through the matter as thoroughly as necessary.

When the Torah writes

לא יחל דברו

He should not profane his word

it is giving expression to the fact that a person's word is a means for him to attain sanctity.

When a person seeks self-expression and individualization, it is not for the purpose of rebellion and protest, rather it is, or it should be, for the realization of one's full potential. That realization puts one on the path to sanctity.

Thus, when one undertakes to make an oath as a way to seek sanctity, as we saw in the episode of Shimon HaTzaddik, the lack of perfection should not raise a permanent barrier to prevent that holy trek. Were it not for the innovation of annulment, the Torah would not have empowered one to make an oath. It is the

¹⁴ See the answer of Shem Mi'Shmuel beginning with the paragraph u'vo'zeh. The answer is based on the opening *maamar* of Shem MiShmuel to Parshas Mattos (5770 d.h. byalkut) and his continued exposition of the thought that is first raised in the former *maamar*.

possibility of the *mumcheh* to annul that presents the safety-net required for making vows and oaths.

We often think of 'doing our own thing' to differentiate ourselves from others as a means of rejection of their values, as a rebellion. That is not the Torah's view. Individuation is to maximize the personal potential that only we have so that we can seek our bond, in the most intimate and personal of ways, with HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

In this period of *Bein HaMetzarim* when that bond seems to be frayed, Parshas Mattos serves as a reminder of one the need to restore our union with G-d with strength and with permanence. Oaths and vows are tools and means, that when used properly, are able to serve that goal¹⁵.

We are to strive to reestablish that union with HaKodosh Boruch Hu, personally and nationally, and deserve the *Geulah Shleima* for which the means we so fervently pray.

B'vircas Nechemas Tziyon

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock

¹⁵ See the concluding Halachos of Hilchos Nedarim, Hilchos Nezirus and Hilchos Sh'vuos in Mishneh Torah LaRambam to be presented with terse statements of propriety and impropriety in making these oaths and vows.

פרשת מסעי

This is a true story. I heard it first-hand from the בעל המעשה.

About 20 years ago or so, an Israeli *bochur*, let's call him Dovid, went to his Rosh HaYeshiva, an *Odom Godol*. The Rosh HaYeshiva was a Yerushalmi.

Dovid asked the Rosh HaYeshiva permission to travel to the United States to participate in the wedding of his *chavrusa* with whom he had been learning for 5 or 6 years. The Rosh HaYeshiva did not hesitate for a second. "No!" Dovid thought that the Rosh HaYeshiva did not want him to take off so much time from learning and so he wanted to make sure that the Rav understood why it was so important for him to go.

'But, Rebbe,' Dovid said, 'He's like my brother!'

'You don't understand,' was the reply. 'I wouldn't leave Eretz Yisroel for my brother either!'

This is a fitting introduction to one of the themes of Parshas Mas'ei, the concluding Sidra of Sefer B'midbar.

Eretz Yisroel.

When we began Sefer B'midbar many weeks ago, Eretz Yisroel was literally around the corner. The whole time that it could have taken from Sinai to reach Israel was a scant eleven days. That is what the Torah will remind us in next week's Parshas D'vorim (Perek 1/Posuk 2):

אַחַד עָשָׂר יוֹם מִחֵרֵב דְּרֹךְ הַר שֵׁעִיר עַד קָדֵשׁ בְּרִנֵּעַ:

It is eleven days from Chorev-Sinai via Mt. Seir until Kadesh Barnea.

And then, in addition to the many misdeeds that we read about in Parshas B'haalosecha, we come to Parshas Sh'lach and the episode of the spies. We read there (B'midbar Perek 14/P'sukim 29, 34):

בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה יִפְּלוּ פְּגָרֵיכֶם וְכָל פְּקַדְיֵיכֶם לְכָל מִסְפָּרְכֶם מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה אֲשֶׁר הִלִּינְתֶם עָלַי:

In this wilderness your carcasses will fall and all of your numbers from those numbered from 20 years old and above because you brought complaints against Me.

בְּמִסְפַּר הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר תֵּרַתֶּם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם לְשָׁנָה יוֹם לְשָׁנָה תִּשְׂאוּ אֶת עוֹנֹתֵיכֶם אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וַיִּדְעַתֶּם אֶת תְּנוּאַתִּי:

According to the number of days that you traveled the land, 40 days; a day for a year, a day for a year you will bear your sins for forty years and you will know My anger.

And now, in our Parsha, after those long years of waiting and anticipation, and perhaps not believing that it would ever happen, our ancestors are on the threshold of entering into Eretz Yisroel in just a number of weeks.

Thus we read in our Parsha (B'midbar Perek 33/P'sukim 50-53):

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּעַרְבַת מוֹאָב עַל יַרְדֵּן יְרֵחוֹ לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: וְהוֹרַשְׁתֶּם אֶת כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם וְאַבְדַּתֶּם אֶת כָּל מִשְׁכֵּייתֶם וְאֶת כָּל צִלְמֵי מִסְכַּתְתֶּם תִּאבְדוּ וְאֶת כָּל בְּמוֹתֶם תִּשְׂמִידוּ: וְהוֹרַשְׁתֶּם אֶת הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם בָּהּ כִּי לָכֵן נָתַתִּי אֶת הָאָרֶץ לְרִשְׁתָּ אֹתָהּ:

Hashem spoke to Moshe at the Plains of Moav near the Jordan River at Jericho saying. Speak to B'nei Yisroel and say to them, 'When you are crossing the Jordan River to the Land of Canaan, you shall drive out all of the inhabitants of the land from before you and you shall destroy all their places of worship and all of the images of metal you shall destroy and all their altars you shall destroy. You shall drive out [the inhabitants of the] land and dwell in it because I Hashem gave you the land to inherit it.'

The Torah continues and writes (Perek 34/Posuk 2):

צוֹ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי אַתֶּם בָּאִים אֶל הָאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן זֹאת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּפְּל לָכֶם בְּנַחֲלָה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְגַבְלֹתֶיהָ:

Command B'nei Yisroel and say to them, 'When you are coming to the Land of Canaan, this is the land that will fall to you as an inheritance, the Land of Canaan by its borders.'

The practical planning to take Eretz Yisroel continues some verses later as we read (ibid. P'sukim 16-18):

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יִנְחִלוּ לָכֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲלֶעָזֶר
הַכֹּהֵן וַיהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נּוּן: וְנָשִׂיא אֶחָד וְנָשִׂיא אֶחָד מִמִּטָּה תִקְחוּ לְנַחֵל אֶת הָאָרֶץ:

Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. 'These are the names of the men who will inherit the land for you: Elazar the Kohen and Yehoshua bin Nun. One prince from each tribe you shall take to inherit the land.'

What type of introduction should we expect in this Parsha which has such a focus on entering Eretz Yisroel and inheriting it? On this eve of their entry, do we not expect to be reminded of the uniqueness of Eretz Yisroel? Should not this be the venue for the wonderful things that we will hear about Eretz Yisroel in Parshas Eikev where we read (D'vorim Perek 8/P'sukim 7-8):

כִּי ה' אֵלֶיךָ מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל אָרֶץ טוֹבָה אָרֶץ נַחֲלֵי מַיִם עֵינֹת וַתְּהַמֵּת יְצֵאִים בְּבִקְעָה
וּבְהָר: אָרֶץ חֹטֶה וּשְׁעָרָה וְגִפְן וַתְּאֲנֶה וְרִמּוֹן אָרֶץ זֵית שֶׁמֶן וְדָבָשׁ:

Hashem your G-d is bringing you to a good land, a land of rivers of waters, springs and depths of waters that come out in the valley and on the mountain. It is a land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of olives that produce oil and date honey.

The Torah writes

אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ

A land flowing with milk and honey

so many times. It would certainly seem that our Parsha would be an appropriate opportunity to host this famous phrase once more.

How does the Torah introduce our Parsha which is suffused with Eretz Yisroel?

The name of our Parsha is its introduction. So we read (B'midbar Perek 33/Posuk 1):

אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְצַבְאֹתָם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן:

These are the travels of B'nei Yisroel who left the Land of Egypt according to their hosts under the hand of Moshe,¹⁶ and Aharon.

Since they were going to Eretz Yisroel would it not have been better to write 'to Eretz Yisroel' than writing 'from the Land of Egypt'?

It is that very point that leads S'fas Emes to comment on the implication of the second verse of our Parsha. We read (Posuk 2):

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת מוֹצְאֵיהֶם לְמַסְעֵיהֶם עַל פִּי ה' וְאֵלֶּה מַסְעֵיהֶם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם:

Moshe wrote their 'taking outs' of their travels according to the Word of Hashem; these are their travels according to their 'taking outs'.

This is certainly an awkward translation. 'Taking outs' might sound more like a restaurant than journeys. 'Going outs' would certainly be less awkward; but that is not what the word מוצאיהם means. If the word was יציאותיהם then 'going out' would be appropriate; but that is not what it says.

S'fas Emes (Mas'ei 5632) writes:

המסעות שנכתבו בתורה מוצאיהם כו' שיש מקומות שאין להם קיום רק על ידי שמתרחק האדם מהם ככל עניני עולם הזה שבטולם זה קיומם. ונקראים מסעות שהמסע משם הוא המעלה שעל ידי זה זכו להיות נזכר בתורה ויש להם מקום ועל ידי זה עצמו מתוקנים להיות נקראים מקום לעצמו כן נראה לי.

The travels that are written in the Torah 'their taking outs' etc. is because there are places that their existence is only justified by the fact that a person distances himself from them. In this world, there are matters that were created for the purpose of providing an opportunity to nullify them.

¹⁶ The comma separating Moshe and Aharon is faithful to the *trop*-notes of the last three words of the verse. ביד משה, in the hand of Moshe, has the טפחא note which is an 'interrupter'. Thus, the comma.

That is the rationale for their existence. [These places] are called 'journeys' because by virtue of journeying *from them* they merit being mentioned in the Torah and therefore they have 'a place'. By this very fact, they are fit to be called a 'place' in and of themselves. So it appears to me.

Philosophically, S'fas Emes is responding to the well-known question:

If G-d is good, why is there evil in the world?

His response is that in order to have good one must distinguish oneself from that which isn't good. 'Good' can only exist when there is an alternative. The alternative to 'good' is evil. Evil exists¹⁷ as a prerequisite for 'good'. If there is no choice other than to be 'good', that 'good' is really nothing because there was no substitute.

Thus, 'evil' does not have any integral justification for its existence. It is similar to a catalyst in chemical bonding. The catalyst does not add substantively to the new compound. However, without addition of the catalyst, the compound could not come into being.

Evil has no substantive value. It does not contribute. However, without its existence, 'good' would have no existence of its own.

Such is the case, S'fas Emes explains, with the places that are listed in our Parsha. These places have no *raison d'être* of their own. They have no substantive justification. Why, then, do they exist? They existed to afford B'nei Yisroel the opportunity to either leave them or to remain attached to them.

¹⁷ A codicil to this question is whether G-d actively created evil or that it somehow appeared because of a vacuum. That is a question that is inherently related to the major question about the existence of evil at all.

We will not focus on that presumably unanswerable question here, but the interested thinker can begin with the verse in Yeshaya (Perek 45/Posuk 7):

יוצר אור ובורא חֹשֶׁךְ עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם ובורא רָע אֲנִי ה' עֹשֶׂה כָּל אֵלֶּה:

I form light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I am Hashem Who does all of this.

By leaving these places, HaKodosh Boruch Hu afforded Israel the opportunity to be taken out of Egypt, not merely in its physical sense but in its spiritual sense as well.

Egyptianism was at its fullest in Egypt, but some was found in these other places as well.

Each exit from one of these places afforded Israel the opportunity to continue to distance themselves from Egypt and Egyptianization, quantitatively and qualitatively.

S'fas Emes continues this theme some years later (5735)¹⁸ where he writes:

ויכתוב משה כו' מוצאיהם למסעיהם כו' כי אלו המסעות היו בפרטות ענין המ"ט שערי טומאה שיצאו מהם בכלל ביציאת מצרים ואחר כן תקנו בהמסעות בפרט. ועם ז' מסעות שחזרו הם מ"ט. וזה מעלה גדולה למשה רבינו עליו השלום שחזר לבני ישראל כל תהלוכות הנהגתו מיציאת מצרים עד ביאתם לארץ. וכן צריך להיות לכל איש ישראל שנקרא מהלך וצריך לזכור בסוף כל מדריגותיו את כל אשר עבר עליו מהתחלת מהלכו. וכן מצינו ביעקב אבינו עליו השלום (בראשית לבי/יא¹⁹) במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה וכל אשר עבר עליו באותן עשרים שנה לא שכח מדריגה ראשונה ועל ידי זה בא להכנעה אמיתית:

Moshe wrote their 'taking outs' of their travels, because these travels that are mentioned specifically represent the 49 levels of impurity from which Israel went out as part of the Exodus from Egypt. Each of these travels [mentioned by name] repaired a specific level of impurity. [Because the 42 travels that are listed here] together with the 7 that they retreated gives the sum of 49.

¹⁸ See S'fas Emes to 5642 for a variation on this theme. See Rashi to the first verse of Mas'ei that supports the numbers S'fas Emes uses there and understand the S'fas Emes well so that Rashi does not contradict himself between Parshas Mas'ei and Parshas Chukkas which is brought later.

¹⁹ The entire verse reads:

קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְּמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה
הֵייתִי לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת:

I am undeserving of all of the kindnesses and all of the truth that You did for Your servant; because [only] with my staff did I cross the Jordan River and now I have become two camps.

This is a great attribute of Moshe Rabbenu of blessed memory that he reviewed for B'nei Yisroel all the paths of his leadership from the Exodus until their entry into The Land. So should every Jew [who is called a 'go-er'] do. He must remember when he reaches the end level all that transpired from the beginning of his journey. We find the same by Yaakov Ovinu of blessed memory who said, 'With my staff I crossed this Jordan River' [and he recalled] all that transpired for him during those twenty years [after he fled from Eisav] he did not forget his original level and therefore came to true humility [before G-d].

Let us first verify the facts that S'fas Emes teaches and then attempt to analyze his writing.

Regarding the number of journeys that the Torah enumerates here, Rashi has already counted them for us and he writes at the beginning of our Parsha:

שהרי...כאן אלא ארבעים ושתיים מסעות.

Here there are only 42 journeys.

In Parshas Chukkas (B'midbar Perek 21/Posuk 4), Rashi teaches us:

...וכאן חזרו לאחוריהם שבע מסעות...

Here [we learn] that they retreated 7 journeys.

Thus we have a total of 49 journeys²⁰.

²⁰ Some commentators point out that there is no contradiction between the 42 journeys enumerated here and the 49 that took place in fact.

Our verse that introduces the 42 journeys writes “על פי ה'”, journeys that were commanded by G-d. Only those 42 journeys were by the Word of G-d, the other seven were done by Israel on their own accord.

There is tension, however, between this idea and the theme of S'fas Emes. If the extra seven journeys were done against G-d's Will, or on their own initiative, how could they have been instrumental in redeeming our ancestors from Egyptianization?

The number 49, S'fas Emes reminds us, is the depths to which Israel sank in the captivity of Mitzrayim. Before they could receive the Torah 49 days later²¹, Israel had to extract itself from the impurity that entered them in Egypt. They were unable to do so on their own, so G-d took them out on a series of journeys that had such extraction as its goal. It was this trek of a considerable amount of journeys over a considerable amount of time that readied them to enter Eretz Yisroel.

However, S'fas Emes adds in this section, it is not merely the arrival in a certain place and then leaving it which causes a higher *madreigah*. It is the contemplation of such, coupled with the historical event that enabled the nation, and enables individuals, to make that transition.

His proof is from Yaakov Ovinu. The brief words that the Torah quotes from our Father Yaakov are merely a précis of all that he had to say. He began from the beginning, his impoverished state as he fled from Eisav²² and told us the conclusion, the wealth that he had amassed. Certainly, S'fas Emes tells us, Yaakov Ovinu filled in all of the pieces and events that occurred between the beginning and the end.

It is precisely because of that contemplation that Israel was able to raise themselves to ever-higher levels in order to deserve to enter Israel. It was the leadership of Moshe Rabbenu that enabled them to do so because at every juncture he surely reminded Israel of that which they were to remember. They were to remember each of those 49 significant events that presented them with a specific challenge that they faced and overcame.

In fact, after learning S'fas Emes, we can look at Rashi's explanation of the need for the list of the travels in a new light. At the beginning of Parshas Mas'ei Rashi

²¹ I do not know why S'fas Emes does not mention this point here. Perhaps he believes it is understood by itself.

²² See footnote 5. Rashi writes there:

כי במקלי - לא היה עמי לא כסף ולא זהב ולא מקנה אלא מקלי לבדו
Because with my staff I did not have silver or gold with me, nor cattle. I only had my staff.

quotes the Midrash Tanchuma here who justifies the need to list all of the travels. He writes:

למה נכתבו המסעות הללו...רבי תנחומא דרש בו...משל למלך שהיה בנו חולה והוליכו למקום רחוק לרפאותו, כיון שהיו חוזרין התחיל אביו מונה כל המסעות. אמר לו כאן ישננו, כאן הוקרנו, כאן חששת את ראשך וכו':

Why were all of these journeys written? Rabi Tanchuma interpreted this through a parable of a King who had a son who was ill and he took him to a distant place to heal him. As they were returning from their travels the father began to note each of the places. He said, 'Here we slept, here we became cold, here your head hurt, etc.

After studying S'fas Emes, this Rashi is seen in new light. On its basic level, every parent understands the message. If we have had traumatic times with our children, the memories are embedded within us. Every time that we are at a place that was connected with that trauma we mention it and share it with our child who may have not been able to understand what was happening in real-time. Thus, when he is mature we can remind him of all that occurred and how fortunate he and we are that we can talk about it together.

However, if we read Rashi carefully, we can discern a deeper meaning regarding each of the places that he mentioned.

'Sleeping' means being unaware of the Divine Providence that was there for us. 'Being cold' means that we distanced ourselves from the warmth of HaKodosh Boruch Hu²³ and the 'head that hurt' was the mind that refused to recognize the Presence of HaKodosh Boruch Hu that accompanied them.

²³ Compare this to the description of the harm that was caused to Israel by Amalek. We read (D'vorim Perek 25/Posuk 18):

אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ יִזְנֵב בְּךָ כָּל הַנְּחָשָׁיִם אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עֵיפָ וְיָגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֶל...ל'קים:
Amalek cooled you off on the way; he attacked the weak ones at you end, in back of you, and you were tired and weary; Amalek did not fear G-d.

Humility is required to recognize one's faults and it is the humility that S'fas Emes uses to connect these journeys. The accomplishment of these journeys is an outcome of the combination of physical visitation, intellectual understanding and emotions comprehension that comes about through telling about the events.

It is with that humility that Israel is to enter what will be their land, *Eretz Yisroel* recognizing the dominion of HaKodosh Boruch Hu. If this verse (Tehillim Perek 24/Posuk 1) is said about the entire world, it applies in certainty to Eretz Yisroel:

לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר לַה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ תִּבְּל וַיֵּשְׁבֵי בָהּ:

For Dovid, a psalm; the land and all that fills it belongs to G-d, the earth and all who live upon it.

Without a sense of G-d's Providence, the requisite submission to His Will would not be accomplished.

Thus, what appeared to be a 'family-type' parable becomes a powerful message of prerequisites of redemption.

However, the *moshol* that Rashi brings is his second explanation of the need to list all of the journeys of Israel. Let us see what he writes in his first explanation:

למה נכתבו המסעות הללו, להודיע חסדיו של מקום, שאף על פי שגזר עליהם לטלטלם ולהניעם במדבר, לא תאמר שהיו נעים ומטולטלים ממסע למסע כל ארבעים שנה ולא היתה להם מנוחה, שהרי אין כאן אלא ארבעים ושתים מסעות. צא מהם י"ד, שכולם היו בשנה ראשונה, קודם גזירה...נמצא שכל שמנה ושלישים שנה לא נסעו אלא עשרים מסעות. זה מיסודו של רבי משה הדרשן.

Why were all of these journeys written? To teach the kindnesses of Hashem. Even though He decreed to jostle them and to move them in the wilderness, do not say they were moved and made to wander from journey to journey the entire 40 years and that they never had rest [from their journeys], because there are only 42 journeys listed here. Remove 14 that

were in the first year prior to the Decree²⁴...the result is that for the entire 38 years they traveled only twenty journeys. This is from the foundation that Rabi Moshe HaDarshan established.

The tenor of this explanation of Rashi is quite different than the second one. There is no 'ill' child; there is no healing process. In fact, the thrust is the opposite: despite the sins of Israel, their punishment was far less harsh than was implied when the punishment was given.

We read in Parshas Shlach (B'midbar Perek 14/P'sukim 21-23, 29, 33-34):

וְאוּלַם חַי אֲנִי וַיִּמְלֵא כְבוֹד ה' אֶת כָּל הָאָרֶץ: כִּי כָל הָאֲנָשִׁים הָרְאִים אֶת כְּבֹדִי וְאֶת אֶתְנִי אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וּבַמִּדְבָּר וַיִּנְסוּ אֹתִי זֶה עֹשֶׁר פְּעָמִים וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי: אִם יִרְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְתֶּם וְכָל מְנַאֲצֵי לֹא יִרְאוּהָ:

בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה יִפְלוּ פְגָרֵיכֶם וְכָל פְּקַדְיֵיכֶם לְכָל מִסְפָּרְכֶם מִבְּנֵי עֲשָׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה אֲשֶׁר הִלִּינְתֶם עָלַי:

וּבְנֵיכֶם יִהְיוּ רַעִים בַּמִּדְבָּר אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וְנִשְׂאוּ אֶת זְנוּתֵיכֶם עַד תֵּם פְּגָרֵיכֶם בַּמִּדְבָּר: בְּמִסְפַּר הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר תִּרְתְּם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם יוֹם לְשָׁנָה יוֹם לְשָׁנָה תִּשְׂאוּ אֶת עֹנֹתֵיכֶם אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וַיִּדְעַתֶּם אֶת תְּנוּאַתִּי: אֲנִי ה' דִּבַּרְתִּי אִם לֹא זֹאת אֲעֲשֶׂה לְכָל הָעֵדָה הָרְעָה הַזֹּאת הַנּוֹעֲדִים עָלַי בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה יִתְמוּ וְשָׁם יָמָתוּ:

But I Hashem take an oath by My Life and the Glory of Hashem will fill the entire earth. That all of the men who see My Glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness and who have tested me these ten times and did not listen to My voice. [I swear] that they will not see the land that I swore to their forefathers and all those who anger Me will not see it.

²⁴ Rashi explains that 8 more journeys should be discounted because they were journeys that Israel did on their own when they retreated. Thus, from the original 42, we subtract 14 and 8, leaving a remainder of 20.

Of course, Rashi tells us here that the retreating journeys of Israel are part of the 42 whereas S'fas Emes says that they are in addition to the 42.

In this wilderness your carcasses will fall and all of your numbers from those numbered from 20 years old and above because you brought complaints against Me.

Your children will be wandering like sheep in the wilderness for forty years and they will bear your infidelities until the end of your carcasses in the wilderness. According to the number of days that you searched the land, forty days, a day for a year, a day for a year, you shall bear your sins forty years and you will know My anger. I Hashem have spoken; if I will not do this to this evil congregation who congregated against Me; in this wilderness they will be finished and there they will die.

Not only was the actual punishment not as harsh as one can sense from these P'sukim in Parshas Shlach Lecha, even the promise that all those over the age of twenty would die, as it says 'all of your numbers', was not fulfilled in its entirety as we learn Masseches Taanis. In the last Mishnah there (26 b), we read:

אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל: לא היו ימים טובים לישראל כחמשה עשר באב וכיום הכפורים.

There were no better days for Israel than the 15th of the month of Av and Yom HaKippurim.

The Gemara (30 b) discusses the significance of the 15th of Av and among the reasons given we read:

רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: יום שכלו בו מתי מדבר.²⁵

²⁵ The Gemara attributes the reason for the rejoicing as being the reinstatement of the uniquely close relationship between Hashem and Moshe Rabbenu. We read there:

דאמר מר: עד שלא כלו מתי מדבר לא היה דבור עם משה, שנאמר (דברים ב/טז-יז) ויהי כאשר תמו כל אנשי המלחמה למות וידבר ה' אלי, אלי היה הדבור.

Rabba bar bar Chanah said in the name of Rabi Yochanan: it was the day in which those who were to die in the wilderness ceased to die²⁵. [The reason for annual happiness is like] that which the master said: Until all of those who were to die in the wilderness died, there was no [direct] Divine speech with

Rashi brings a Braisa that explains what the events surrounding that time when they 'ceased to die':

כל ארבעים שנה שהיו במדבר בכל ערב תשעה באב היה הכרוז יוצא ואומר: צאו לחפור, והיה כל אחד ואחד יוצא וחופר לו קבר, וישן בו, שמא ימות קודם שיחפור, ולמחר הכרוז יוצא וקורא: יבדלו חיים מן המתים, וכל שהיה בו נפש חיים - היה עומד ויוצא, וכל שנה היו עושין כן, ובשנת ארבעים שנה עשו, ולמחר עמדו כולן חיים, וכיון שראו כך תמהו ואמרו: שמא טעינו בחשבון החדש חזרו ושכבו בקבריהן בלילות עד ליל חמשה עשר, וכיון שראו שנתמלאה הלבנה בחמשה עשר, ולא מת אחד מהם - ידעו שחשבון חדש מכוון, וכבר ארבעים שנה של גזרה נשלמו, קבעו אותו הדור לאותו היום יום טוב.

For the entire 40 years that they were in the wilderness, every Erev Tish'a B'av an announcement was made, "Go and dig your graves". Everyone went out and dug a grave for himself and slept in it – perhaps he would die before he completed digging. The next day there was an announcement that said, "Let the living be separated from the dead." All those who were alive stood and went out from the grave. So they did annually.

In the fortieth year they did so and all were alive the next morning. They were surprised and said, 'Perhaps we erred in the days of the month.' They returned to the graves and slept in them every night until the 15th. When they saw the full moon on the 15th and no one had died they knew that their original calculations were correct and already the decree of 40 years was completed. That generation established that day as a Yom Tov.

Thus, the specific counting of the travels and journeys according to this first explanation does not have an ominous tone. It is not threatening as the second explanation of the Midrash Tanchuma. It does not imply at all that without the accounting Israel would have been unworthy to enter Eretz Yisroel.

If so, why are all the places mentioned, according to this explanation²⁶?

Moshe Rabbenu. This is as it says, "And it was when all the men of war ceased to die, Hashem spoke to me." [The interpretation is] "The speech was directed to me."

²⁶ It would seem that if the sole intention of these many verses that begin our Parsha was to demonstrate G-d's kindness, the Torah could have found a way to

Shem MiShmuel offers an answer that at first may seem similar to that of S'fas Emes, but in fact is very different.

Shem MiShmuel agrees that each of the sites mentioned had a purpose, a purpose that was formative.

However, unlike S'fas Emes who saw each of these sites as a means of removing evil traits from Israel, erasing one of the negative levels of impurity, Shem MiShmuel sees each of these sites as an opportunity for Israel to prove itself and raise itself to high levels of distinction as they prepare to enter Eretz Yisroel.

In the opening *maamar* to Parshas Mas'ei (5670), he discusses two aspects of being able to turn from evil.

The Posuk in Tehillim (Perek 34/Posuk 15) commands:

סור מֵרַע וְעֲשֵׂה טוֹב בִּקְשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרַדְּפֵהוּ:

Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it

That is, prior to doing that which is good, one must rid himself from bad.

However, there are two levels of turning from evil, Shem MiShmuel explains.

...והנה בסור מרע יש שתי בחינות, אחת כאשר יבואו לאדם מחשבות רעות יברח מהן ויסיחן תיכף מדעתו ולא יהרהר בהן כלל אם לעשות או לא...

Included in סור מרע, turning from evil, are two aspects. The first is that when a person has evil thoughts he banishes them and removes them immediately from his mind and does not think about them at all whether to do what the thoughts say or not.

He continues:

אך יש עוד בחינה גדולה מזה, וכאמרם ז"ל (עבודה זרה יז ב) ניזיל אפיתחא דבי זונות וניכפיי' ליצרין ונקבל אגרא, היינו כדי להכניע את הצד הרע... ובאמת זו בחינה

abbreviate the list and still give across the same message. Why is each and every place mentioned?

גבוהה מאוד, ולא ניתנה לכל אדם ובכל זמן, רק לאנשי המעלה שהם מזוככים בתכלית הזיכור, ובזמנים מיוחדים שאין לצד הרע כל כך שליטה בעולם.

But there is another aspect that is greater than this. It is what Chazal said, "Let us go and stand by a house of prostitution and we will overcome our *yetzer hard'* and receive reward." That is, to make the *yetzer hard'* submissive.

In fact, this is a very high aspect and it is not for everyone to attempt, nor at any time. It is only for those on a very high level who are completely refined and in special times when evil has no rule over the world.

At this point Shem MiShmuel brings the Zohar (Part II, Page 184) that writes that Hashem took Israel to the wilderness which is a place that is inhabited by Soton²⁷ so that Israel would be able to break the power of Soton. Regarding that description of the purpose of the sojourn, he writes:

והיא הבחינה השניה מסור מרע וכעין ש"ס עבודה זרה הנ"ל.

²⁷ Certainly this is a Kabbalistic idea about which we have most limited understanding. Nonetheless, we can find sources that indicate that, in fact, the wilderness is a place of abode for Soton.

In Masseches Yoma (87 b), the Gemara discusses why the destination of the goat of Yom HaKippurim that was sent to die was to *Azazel* in the desert as we read in Parshas Acharei Mos (Vayikro Perek 16/Posuk 10):

וְהַשְּׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגּוֹרֵל לְעֶזְאֵל יַעֲמֵד חַי לְפָנַי ה' לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו לְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ לְעֶזְאֵל הַמִּדְבָּרָה:
The goat upon which was placed the lottery to Azazel will stand alive before G-d to atone for him, to send it to Azazel to the wilderness.

Rashi writes in the Gemara there:

מלאכי חבלה שירדו לארץ בימי נעמה אחות תובל קין ועליהם נאמר ויראו בני האלהים את בנות האדם (בראשית ו/ב).

Angels of destruction came down to earth in the days of Naama, the sister of Tuval Kayin and about them it says, "The sons of the nobility saw the daughters of the [common] man."

This is that second aspect of *סור מרע*, turning from evil, and like that which Chazal wrote in the aforementioned *Masseches Avoda Zara*.

והשם יתברך הוליכם דוקא דרך (דברים א/יט²⁸) המדבר הגדול והנורא בכוונה הנ"ל:

Hashem Yisborach led them specifically into the great and fearful wilderness with the above intent [to allow them to make the *Yetzer Hara'* submissive.

That is, in this second aspect, one deals with the *Yetzer* by meeting it head-on, rather than fleeing from it to avoid it. The wilderness, an abode of the *Soton*, or *Yetzer Hara'*²⁹, was the ideal place for the confrontation. It was man against the nature of the evil impulse. It was there that there was the clearest opportunity for one who could meet the challenge to bring the *Yetzer Hara* to total submission.

And *Shem MiShmuel* concludes this immediate section with a testimony to the greatness of our ancestors in the wilderness, while noting that no one should try to imitate the tests to which they were subjected. He writes:

ונראה דדוקא דור המדבר היו מסוגלים לזה, באשר היו ניזונים ממן ומבאר והיו דור דעה וכל עסקם היה תורה ועבודה לבד הם היו יכולין לילך בדרך הזה, כי היו בתכלית הדיבוק להשם יתברך. וזו היתה הכנה לזמן שיבואו לארץ ישראל ויעסקו בדברים גשמיים גם כן לחרוש ולזרוע וכדומה יהיה צד הרע מוכנע...ושעל כל פנים יהיה ביכלתם לדחות את צד הרע מהם כמו בבחינה הראשונה מסור מרע:

²⁸ The entire verse reads:

וַנִּסַּע מִחֲרֵב וַנֵּלֶךְ אֶת כָּל הַמִּדְבָּר הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא הַהוּא אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתֶם דֶּרֶךְ הַר הָאֵמֹרִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲתָנוּ וַנָּבֵא עַד קִדְשׁ בְּרִנֶּע:

We traveled from *Chorev* and we went that entire great and awesome wilderness that you saw, by way of mountains of the *Emorites* as Hashem our G-d commanded us and we came to *Kadesh Barnea*.

²⁹ In *Masseches Sukka* (53 a) we learn that *Soton*, *Mal'ach HaMaves* and *Yetzer Hara'* are all synonymous.

It appears that only the generation of the wilderness were fit for this [test] because they were nourished by the *mon* and [the water] of the well [of Miriam]. They were the דור דעה, generation of knowledge³⁰ and all of their involvement was exclusively Torah and service of G-d.

They were able to go on this path because they were at the highest level of clinging to G-d. This all was a preparation for the time that they would enter Eretz Yisroel and be involved in the materialistic as well [as the spiritual]. They would plow and plant and other similar activities and even so the evil side would be humbled...and in any event they would be able to push away the aspect of evil as in the first [and lower] aspect of סור מרע, turning from evil³¹.

We thus have two ways to look at the travels of our ancestors that the Torah details with such precision as it introduces us to their immediate entry into Eretz Yisroel.

One way is to see that they had to continually battle against the overwhelming power of Egyptianization to which they were exposed and immersed in for well over two centuries.

They could not overcome that powerful force immediately. Four decades were required to cleanse them of the evil that had permeated their souls over so many

³⁰ The Zohar explains that this accolade of דור דעה applied to the generation of the Midbar because they *knew* that there was G-d. Such a sense was completely internalized with them. See, for example, Zohar to Parshas B' Shalach (Page 62 b).

We remember what Chazal (Mehilta Masseches Shira Parshata 3) taught regarding the visions at the Red Sea:

שראתה שפחה על הים מה שלא ראו ישעיה ויחזקאל

That which the maidservant saw at the Red Sea was greater than that which Yeshaya and Yechezkel saw.

And, of course, the sighting at the sea was incomparably less than that which was seen at Sinai when the Torah was given.

³¹ See Meshech Chochmoh to B'midbar Perek 32/Posuk 1 who attributes unexcelled spiritual excellence to the tribes of Reuven and Gad and all of the tribes.

years. Only after visiting place after place, contemplating their meanings and internalizing their message were they able to ascend from the pit of evil.

The alternative way of looking at those years is to say that they had quickly raised themselves from the Egyptian mire. But this alone was insufficient preparation by which they could enter Eretz Yisroel. They had the tasks of the *Midbar* before them in order to reach uniquely high levels of spiritual accomplishment which they would internalize when they were part of the materialistic pursuits of Eretz Yisroel. Though those pursuits would be materialistic objectively, subjectively they would not lower their spirituality by one iota.

On the one hand it is easier to be appreciative of the more complimentary approach of Shem MiShmuel than that of S'fas Emes. After all, the former attributed a far greater level to our ancestors than did S'fas Emes. Shem MiShmuel saw each and every one of the wilderness journeys as an opportunity to add on a new level of spiritual accomplishment, not just to remove the degradations of Egypt as S'fas Emes taught.

On the other hand, when we remember the purpose of all of this information, the approach of Shem MiShmuel seems overwhelming.

The purpose of the detailed information about our ancestors' travels was to ready us for this verse in our Parsha (Perek 34/Posuk 2):

צו את בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כי אתם באים אל הארץ כנען זאת הארץ אשר
תפל לכם בנחלה ארץ כנען לגבלתיה:

Command B'nei Yisroel and say to them, 'When you are coming to the Land of Canaan; this is the land that will fall to you as an inheritance, the Land of Canaan according to its borders.

Apparently, Rashi was troubled as to why the Torah had to use the many ensuing verses to outline the borders of Eretz Yisroel. When they will finally enter the land, banish the inhabitants and then take possession, we will learn the borders of each and every tribe. With such a map, delineating all of those borders, we will then know the borders of Eretz Yisroel. It will be the aggregate of the individual

borders of each tribe. If so, why does the Torah need to spell out those borders here?

It is this question that Rashi comments on in this verse:

זאת הארץ אשר תפול לכם וגו' - לפי שהרבה מצות נוהגות בארץ ואין נוהגות בחוצה לארץ, הוצרך לכתוב מצרני גבולי רוחותיה סביב, לומר לך מן הגבולים הללו ולפנים המצות נוהגות:

This is the land that will fall to you etc.-Because there are many Mitzvos that apply in the Land that do not apply outside of the Land, the Torah needed to write the borders on all of its sides, all around to teach you that from these borders and inside those Mitzvos apply.

Now, if S'fas Emes is correct, and we are correct in aligning the second commentary of Rashi as being in consonance with his explanation, it is relatively easy to deserve to receive Eretz Yisroel from HaKodosh Boruch Hu. The standard *סור מרע*, turn from evil, is sufficient.

However, if Shem MiShmuel is correct, and we are correct in aligning the first commentary of Rashi as being in consonance with *his* explanation, then so much more is expected of us to be able to claim that we deserve to receive Eretz Yisroel from HaKodosh Boruch Hu. It is not sufficient to remove bad traits, Egyptianism, from us. It is not enough to be devoid of negatives. In order to deserve Eretz Yisroel we must be constantly adding to our virtues, continuously growing in a positive sense.

These thoughts are far more potent in these days of hardship, *Bein HaMetzarim*, that take us in ever-increasing sadness towards Tish'a B'av. This is a period of time when our Brachos of *Bonei Yerushaloyim*, imploring Hashem to rebuild Jerusalem, bring Moshiach, hear our prayers and let us see His return to Zion with mercy are endowed with ever-increasing intent and devotion.

Isn't it hard enough to meet the test of the first level of *סור מרע* of *Shem MiShmuel*? Certainly we cannot be expected to meet that second test. That belongs to extraordinarily unique people and we do not pretend to be them.

We can let the trek of our ancestors inspire us and follow in their footsteps, tracing their paths and remembering where we have been and becoming dedicated to where we wish to be and ask Hashem to speak to us once more and say:

כִּי אַתֶּם בָּאִים אֶל הָאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן

במהרה בימנו May we merit that promise.

B'vircas Nechemas Tziyon

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock