

חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

by Dr. Joseph Geliebter

Topics discussed

Parashas Mattos

I

- Rashi's view on the connection between the laws of *nedarim* (vows) and the heads of the tribes
- A fundamental change in the leadership of the Jewish people
- In Parashas Mattos begins the transition to the new leadership

II

- The change in the wording of the command to take vengeance
- "As water reflects, a face reflects a face"
- Moshe as the agent of Hashem's vengeance
- A lesson regarding our affliction in exile

Parashas Mattos - Massei

For any questions, comments, or to join the mailing list, contact the author at chamudeishai@gmail.com

Parashas Mattos

I

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' (במדבר ל, ב).

"Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Bnei Yisrael, saying: 'This is the matter that Hashem has commanded.'" (Bamidbar 30:2)

The commentators have already noted this departure from the Torah's usual introduction to a new subject, which is the phrase, וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying." It is self-evident that Moshe first taught Aharon, then Aharon's sons, then the elders, who were the heads of the tribes, and only afterward the rest of the nation, as stated in *Eruvin* 54b and cited by Rashi in *Parashas Ki Sisa* (Shemos 34:32). Why, then, does the Torah place special emphasis here on the fact that Moshe taught these laws first to the *rashei hamattos* (heads of the tribes)? After all, this was the normal order in any event.

Rashi's view on the connection between the laws of *nedarim* (vows) and the heads of the tribes

Rashi explains (s.v. *Roshei hamattos*):

Parashas Massei

- **The journeys were also spiritual**
- **The forty-two journeys: forty-two eternal lessons for every Jew**
- **Finding ourselves**
- **Avraham Avinu, the first traveler, as the root of the journeys of Bnei Yisrael**
- **From Mitzrayim to Eretz Yisrael: a journey of spiritual ascent**

II

- **Hadran alach (We shall return to you), Sefer Bamidbar**
- **The journeys: the story of the Jewish people's faith**
- **The secret of the parallel between the journeys and the cities of the Leviim**

III

- **The first time the date of a Tzaddik's passing is recorded in the Torah.**
- **The month of Av and Aharon's role.**
- **Aharon was our spiritual anchor throughout the forty years in the**

He accorded honor to the tribal leaders by teaching them first, and only afterwards the rest of the Bnei Yisrael. And how do we know the same was true with the other commandments? For it says, "Aharon and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him... and afterward all the Bnei Yisrael approached." Why, then, was this explicitly stated here? To teach that *hataras nedarim* (the annulment of vows) may be performed by a single recognized expert, and if there is no such expert, by three ordinary judges" (*Bava Basra* 120b).

According to Rashi's approach, the special emphasis on the heads of the tribes is specifically because of the laws of *nedarim*, teaching us that *hataras nedarim* requires either a single recognized expert or a *beis din* (court of law). We may further elaborate upon Rashi's words by noting that this is not merely a "dry legal rule" requiring either an expert or a court. *Hataras nedarim* involves exceedingly delicate matters, especially when it concerns matters "between a husband and his wife, or between a father and his daughter" (30:17). These matters call upon all the wisdom and expertise of a family court, as is evident from the discussions in *Maseches Nedarim* concerning what constitutes *inui nefesh* (personal affliction) and what is considered *devarim shebeino leveinah* (matters between husband and wife). This involves far more judicial deliberation than a case about some "religious ritual." According to Rashi, then, the emphasis on the heads of the tribes is unique to the laws of *nedarim*.

I would, however, humbly propose an additional approach to this. The emphasis on the heads of the tribes teaches us about a turning point in the leadership of the Jewish people, one that already began in *Parashas Pinchas*, as I shall explain.

A fundamental change in the leadership of the Jewish people

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֶל הָר הָעֵבְרִים הַזֶּה וּרְאֵה אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. וּרְאִיתָהּ אָתָּה וְנִאֲסַפְתָּ אֶל עַמִּיךָ גַּם אֶתָּה כְּאֲשֶׁר נִאֲסַף אֶהֱרֹן אֲחִיךָ

"Hashem said to Moshe: 'Ascend this mountain of the Avarim and see the land that I have given to the Bnei Yisrael. You shall see it, and then you too shall be gathered to your people, just as Aharon your brother was gathered.'" (Bamidbar 27:12-13)

wilderness.

- **The power of the *yahrtzeit*: "Be among the disciples of Aharon."**

Moshe receives the news that the era of his unique leadership has come to an end. Throughout that era, he alone led the Jewish people, and everything was directed solely by the explicit command of Hashem. Every instruction came directly from Hashem, and Moshe led only after receiving each command from Him.

וידבר משה אל ה' לאמר

"Moshe spoke to Hashem, saying..." (27:15)

Moshe now departs from his accustomed manner. Instead of waiting to hear from Hashem, as he had done for more than forty years, Moshe himself takes the initiative and turns to Hashem out of concern for the future leadership of Klal Yisrael. This independent initiative already establishes the pattern of the new form of leadership, as we shall explain.

יפקד ה' אלקי הרוח לְכָל בָּשָׂר אִישׁ עַל הָעֵדָה. אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא לְפָנֵיהֶם וְאֲשֶׁר יָבֵא לְפָנֵיהֶם וְאֲשֶׁר יוֹצִיאֵם וְאֲשֶׁר יְבִיאֵם, וְלֹא תִהְיֶה עֵדָת ה' כְּצֹאֵן אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהֶם רֹעֶה... קַח לָךְ אֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נֹון אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ בּוֹ... וְהִעֲמַדְתָּ אֹתוֹ לְפָנַי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן... וְשָׂאֵל לוֹ בְּמִשְׁפַּט הָאוּרִים לְפָנַי ה'...

"May Hashem, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of Hashem will not be like sheep that have no shepherd... Take for yourself Yehoshua the son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit... You shall present him before Elazar the Kohen, and he shall inquire for him through the judgment of the Urim before Hashem..." (27:15–21).

Here we find, in addition to the succession from Moshe to Yehoshua, a fundamental change in leadership. Under Moshe's leadership everything was conducted through explicit commands from Hashem, with Moshe directing every detail solely according to Hashem's word, never on his own initiative (apart from the three matters that Moshe did on his own initiative, all of which Hashem afterward explicitly agreed; see what I wrote in *Chamudei Shai* on Bereishis in the essay on *Simchas Torah*). After Moshe's leadership, the nation's affairs would be conducted according to the judgment of its leaders, as we alluded to above. Furthermore, after Moshe there would no longer be a single leader. Instead, authority would be divided among several individuals.

Yehoshua would indeed serve as the principal leader. Nevertheless, he would depend upon Elazar HaKohen, upon the *Urim VeTumim* that Elazar bore upon his heart, and upon the entire congregation, that is, the *Sanhedrin* (Supreme Court), who are the *rashei hamattos*, the heads of the tribes.

In Parashas Mattos begins the transition to the new leadership

In our *parashah*, those individuals who possess positions of authority already begin to assume the reins of leadership. We will cite several examples:

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה אֶלֶף לְמִשָּׁה לְצָבָא אֹתָם וְאֵת פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְכָלִי הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְחֻצְצֹרוֹת הַתְּרוּעָה בְּיָדָם
"Moshe sent them, one thousand from each tribe, to the army, them together with Pinchas the son of Elazar the Kohen, to the army, with the holy vessels and the trumpets for sounding in his hand" (31:6).

Pinchas serves here in the capacity of the *Kohen Mashuach Milchamah* (the priest anointed for war). (For the special reasons why Pinchas, rather than Elazar, fulfilled this role, see Rashi there.)

וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְאֵת עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשְּׁבִי וְאֵת הַמִּלְקוֹחַ וְאֵת הַשְּׁלָל אֵל הַמַּחֲנֶה אֵל עֵרְבַת מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל יַרְדֵּן יְרֵחוֹ. וַיָּצֵאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְכָל גִּשְׁיָאֵי הָעֵדָה לִקְרָאתָם אֶל מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה

"They brought to Moshe, to Elazar the Kohen, and to the congregation of Bnei Yisrael the captives, the spoils, and the booty, to the camp in the plains of Moav by the Yarden near Yericho. And Moshe, Elazar the Kohen, and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp" (31:12-13).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֶל אַנְשֵׁי הַצָּבָא הַבָּאִים לַמִּלְחָמָה זֹאת
"Elazar the Kohen said to the soldiers who had come from the war: 'This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem commanded Moshe'" (31:21).

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. שָׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ מִלְקוֹחַ הַשְּׁבִי בְּאָדָם וּבְבְהֵמָה אֹתָהּ וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְרָאשֵׁי אֲבוֹת הָעֵדָה
"Hashem said to Moshe, saying: 'Take a census of the captured booty, both of man and of animal – you, Elazar the Kohen, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the congregation'" (31:25-26).

And above all:

וַיִּצְוֵה לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְאֵת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נֹון וְאֵת רָאשֵׁי אֲבוֹת הַמִּשְׁטוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
"Moshe commanded them through Elazar the Kohen, Yehoshua son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael" (32:28).

In our *parashah*, Moshe establishes the new leadership and accords them honor. According to this, it may be said that וַיְדַבֵּר "Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes" was intended not merely because of the laws of vows, but also to accord them honor for their part in the new leadership of Am Yisrael (the Jewish nation).



II

The change in the wording of the command to take vengeance

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: נָקָם נִקְמַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֵת הַמִּדְיָנִים אַחֵר תִּאָּסֵף אֶל־עַמִּיךָ: וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם
לֵאמֹר הִחְלִצוּ מֵאִתְּכֶם אַנְשִׁים לְצָבָא וַיְהִיו עַל־מִדְיָן לְתֵת נִקְמַת־ה' בְּמִדְיָן

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: 'Take the vengeance of Bnei Yisrael against the Midianites; afterward you shall be gathered to your people.' Moshe then spoke to the people, saying: 'Arm men from among yourselves for the army, and let them go against Midian to execute the vengeance of Hashem against Midian'" (Bamidbar 31:1-3).

Hashem instructed Moshe to take the vengeance of *Bnei Yisrael*, but Moshe

changes the wording of the command and instructs the people to "execute the vengeance of Hashem against Midian." Rashi explains that Moshe changed the wording to "the vengeance of Hashem" in order to teach that one who rises against Yisrael is considered as though he has risen against Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

"As water reflects, a face reflects a face"

In my humble opinion, this may also be explained based on the well-known principle found in *Chazal* (the Talmudic sages) and the *sefarim hakedoshim* (holy works), that no matter what it concerns, Hashem and His treasured people, Yisrael, always hold kindness and gratitude toward one another and not toward themselves. The source of this idea in *Chazal* is *Maseches Berachos* 6a:

...Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Yisrael: "You have made Me a unique entity in the world, and I will make you a unique entity in the world. You have made Me a unique entity in the world, as it says, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' 'Hear, O Israel, Hashem is our , Hashem is One.' And I will make you a unique entity in the world, as it says, וְיִמִּי כַעֲמֹד יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ 'Who is like Your people Yisrael, one nation on the earth?'"

Based on this principle, the *Kedushas Levi* and other *sefarim hakedoshim* explain why in common, everyday speech, and also when we speak *Torah sheh'baal-peh* (Oral Torah), the holiday of the Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus of Egypt) is called "Pesach" (Passover), whereas in the *Torah shebikhtav* (Written Torah), which is entirely the language of the word of Hashem written by Moshe, it is called "*Chag HaMatzos*" ("the holiday of Matzos").

The commentators explain that we remember Hashem's intervention in saving us by passing over our homes during the plague of the firstborn, and therefore we call the holiday "Pesach." Hashem, however, calls it "*Chag HaMatzos*," as praise to us for our faith in Him in leaving Mitzrayim in haste, without questions and without lengthy preparations, so hastily that there was no time for the dough to rise, and we had only *matzos* (unleavened bread). We saw Hashem's mighty hand, Hakadosh Baruch Hu passed over the homes of Bnei Yisrael; therefore, we call the holiday "Pesach." This is from our perspective. Hashem calls it "*Chag HaMatzos*" to emphasize the unwavering faith of the Jewish people, that we left Egypt in haste, without any questions or elaborate preparations.

So too here. Hashem commands Moshe to wage war against Midian as vengeance for Bnei Yisrael. But Moshe analyzes the situation. He sees the great *chilul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem's Name) that the Midianites caused. They caused Jews to stumble and sin by sending their daughters, together with the daughters of Moav, to seduce them and lead them into *avodah zarah* (idolatry), thereby bringing about a terrible *chilul Hashem*. Moshe wished to take vengeance specifically in the Name of Hashem. From Moshe's point of view, Bnei Yisrael would wage war for the vengeance of Hashem. Hashem, on the other hand, seeks vengeance for the spiritual disgrace, degradation, and punishment that Midian brought upon Bnei Yisrael; therefore, Hashem commands, "Take the vengeance of *Bnei Yisrael* against the Midianites."

A further explanation may be suggested that Moshe's command concerning "the vengeance of Hashem" was also strategic. When an army goes out to war, the soldiers are inspired with greater intensity by recognizing the ideal for which

they are fighting. And there is no higher purpose for which to fight than for "the vengeance of Hashem," to uphold the honor of Hashem Himself.

Moshe as the agent of Hashem's vengeance

The Maharal Tzintz, in *Melo HaOmer*, offers another approach based on subtle allusions, and his words are fitting for the one who said them. He explains that when Hashem tells Moshe, "Take the vengeance of Bnei Yisrael," He appoints Moshe as His *shliach* (agent) to carry out that vengeance by virtue of the principle, "*Sheluch shel adam kemoso*" ("A person's agent is like the person himself"). Moshe, as Hashem's agent, tells Bnei Yisrael to execute the vengeance of Hashem against Midian. In other words, the mission of vengeance passes from Hashem to Moshe, and from Moshe to the people.

In this war against Midian, the wicked Bilam was killed, for he was responsible for the death of the 24,000 members of Klal Yisrael who perished through Baal Pe'or. Bilam had advised Balak with the scheme that led Bnei Yisrael astray through the daughters of Moav and Midian. At last, through this Divinely ordained mission of vengeance, Bilam met the end he deserved.

A lesson regarding our affliction in our exile

In our exile, we suffer losses and tragedies, and we turn to Hashem asking Him to take vengeance for His great Name, but to also do it in our name, for such is His way. In *Av HaRachamim* (a Shabbos memorial prayer for martyrs), we ask Hashem that He avenge, before our eyes, the spilled blood of His servants. We lack the power to go out to battle in the Name of Hashem, but we ask Hashem to wage battle

in our name, in addition to taking vengeance for His honor.

אֵל נִקְמוֹת ה', אֵל נִקְמוֹת הוֹפִיעַ. הַנִּשָּׂא שֹׁפֵט הָאָרֶץ, הַשֵּׁב
גְּמוּלָה עַל גָּאִים

"G-d of vengeance, Hashem; G-d of vengeance, appear! Arise, O Judge of the earth; render recompense to the arrogant."
(Tehillim 94:1-2)

May it be speedily in our day, *amen*,
kein yehi ratzon (Amen, may it be His will).



Parashas Massei

I

אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְעִבְרָאֲתָם
בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן: וַיְכַתֵּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מוֹצְאֵיהֶם לְמַסְעֵיהֶם עַל־פִּי
ה' וְאֵלֶּה מַסְעֵיהֶם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם:

"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who went out from the Land of Egypt according to their legions, under the hand of Moshe and Aharon. Moshe recorded their departures according to their journeys, by the command of Hashem; and these are their journeys according to their departures"
(Bamidbar 33:1-2).

The commentators note the reversal of the wording in these verses. At first, it says, "their departures according to their journeys," and afterward, "their journeys according to their departures." The *Sefas Emes* (5633) explains:

It appears that only after all the journeys was *Yetzias Mitzrayim* (the Exodus of Egypt) completed. For with every journey they became further removed from Mitzrayim, until they arrived in Eretz Yisrael... This is the meaning of "their departures according to their journeys." Afterwards, to the extent

that a person journeys and draws closer to Hashem, his departure becomes complete, in that he has separated himself from physicality. [This is the meaning of "their journeys according to their departures."] Each one assists the other."

The *Sefas Emes* is explaining here that every journey represented a distancing from Egypt, which symbolizes physicality, and a drawing closer to Eretz Yisrael, which symbolizes spirituality. He connects the word "מוצאיהם" "motza'eihem" ("their departures") with the word "יצאו" "yatz'u" ("they went out") in the previous verse (33:1), referring to *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. Thus, every journey was a continuation of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and a further distancing from physicality.

The forty-two journeys: forty-two eternal lessons for every Jew

The journeys of Bnei Yisrael through the wilderness for forty years were not recorded merely as historical documentation. Rather, like the rest of the Torah, they were written to teach eternal lessons. In our context, they symbolize the journeys of Klal Yisrael throughout its generations, as well as the journeys of every individual throughout his life. This is indeed found throughout the works of *Chassidus* on our parashah in the name of the *Baal Shem Tov*, may his merit protect us: Just as Bnei Yisrael underwent forty-two journeys, so must every Jewish soul pass through "forty-two journeys," that is, forty-two spiritual stages during its lifetime.

Finding ourselves

Based on the above, I would suggest, in the style of a *derush* (homiletic interpretation), that מוצאיהם "motza'eihem" [their departures/exits] is also built out of

two additional terms: from מצא – "to find" and מציאות – "reality." Therefore, the full intention of מוצאיהם is "these are their departures to find their reality (themselves)," an existential searching. This teaches us a lesson for all our journeys, in all times.

When people travel, they are essentially searching to find something. Some people seek adventure, some seek to find things they have never seen before, others seek to find themselves, and the tzaddik goes to discover spiritual growth and to find the Shechinah in her exile.

Chazal teach: *Yaga'ta u'matzata, taamin* "If you have toiled and found, believe."

Yaga'ta (you toiled): If you invest effort, whether in Torah study or other important purposes,
u'matzata (and you found): And then you find what you were seeking as a reward for your toil,
ta'amin (believe): Everything is only with complete faith in Hashem and the power of perfect faith.

If by the power of your faith, you exert **effort** to undertake the journey, then you will find what you were seeking.

The root of it all lies in the journeys of our forefathers in the wilderness. Bnei Yisrael did not know where they were traveling. Only Hashem knew the destination. Whenever they saw the Clouds of Glory begin to rise and move, they knew that this was a sign for them to travel, without question, toward an unknown destination. There were forty-two such stops in which the destination was not known in advance. They journeyed with complete and absolute faith. וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ בָּה' וּבְמֹשֶׁה עֲבָדוֹ "They believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant."

Every time they traveled, it was to discover the next place that Hashem prepared for them, because it was not merely a physical journey but a spiritual one as well. They traveled with complete *emunah* (faith) and *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem through the desolation of the wilderness. Life in the wilderness was a spiritual existence. They did not work fields or sow crops. Every day, the *mahn* (manna) descended from Heaven, from no known place. They *found* the *mahn* upon the ground each morning. Everything occurred through miracles, outside the natural system that operates through predictable cause and effect. Rather, everything came by way of a "finding," appearing from nowhere and specifically during a lapse of attention.

Avraham Avinu, the first traveler, as the root of the journeys of Bnei Yisrael

Avraham Avinu was the first traveler of the journeys of Bnei Yisrael. When Hashem commanded him לְךָ-לְךָ... אֶל-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה "Go forth... to the land that I will show you," Avraham did not know where he was going. This was one of the great tests of his faith. He was compelled to rise and leave for an unknown destination, relying solely upon his trust in Hashem. That same unwavering faith assisted him in meriting the title of "the founding father of the Jewish nation." In our parashah, every journey begins with "*motza'eihem le'masa'eihem*," from a known point of departure but toward an unknown destination. Bnei Yisrael likewise journeyed with trust in Hashem. "*Yagata u'matzasa*": These seekers of truth, these adventurers, when they finally arrived, it became "*masa'eihem le'motza'eihem*." After journeying with simple faith and complete trust in Hashem, they found another level of spiritual growth. These travelers were spiritual adventurers, seeking and searching for the will of Hashem, and out of these

aspirations they traveled on these journeys. Hashem commanded Moshe to record all forty-two journeys in the Torah as praise for Bnei Yisrael, who accepted these journeys with faith, each time without knowing where they were going, traveling "*al pi Hashem*" ("by the word of Hashem") through the power of *bitachon*.

From Mitzrayim to Eretz Yisrael: a journey of spiritual ascent

The *pesukim* (verses) may be explained as follows. "These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael..."—a journey of searching and seeking. "These are their journeys according to their departures"—at the end of the journeys, they find what they are seeking. Yet it was "their journeys... their departures", in the plural, because with every single journey they rose spiritually. Their faith ascended to yet another level until, at last, they reached their final destination, in the secret of אֶל-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה "To the land that I will show you," namely, the Eretz Yisrael.

This was after a long journey from the land of Egypt. The opening *pasuk*, "These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael, who went out from the Land of Egypt..." establishes the point from which the journey began. They departed from the depths of the forty-nine gates of impurity. From that lowest point began the journey of a newly formed nation, a people of seekers and searchers looking for their path. Even at the cost of passing through a desolate wilderness, they journeyed in order to realize their aspirations to develop into a nation of believers and ascend in the levels of *bitachon* and, finally, after forty-two stops, reach their destination, Eretz Yisrael. לְךָ-לְךָ... אֶל-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה. Bnei Yisrael were the continuation of the journey of Avraham Avinu. It simply took them longer to find that land, but in the end, as a strong nation, they arrived in Eretz Yisrael.

We pray that we merit the ingathering of our people from the four corners of the earth to our Land, Eretz Yisrael, and that we merit to behold the rebuilt Yerushalayim speedily in our day, Amen.



II

אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאתם
ביד משה ואהרן

"These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who went out from the land of Egypt according to their divisions, under the leadership of Moshe and Aharon.

Hadran Alach, Sefer Bamidbar

Upon reaching the concluding parashah of Sefer Bamidbar, we offer a *derashas hadran* (concluding sermon) and reflect upon the entire Book of Bamidbar.

Sefer Bamidbar opens with the encampment of Bnei Yisrael in the wilderness according to their banners and the order of their journeys, and this theme occupies a prominent place throughout the first three *parashiyos*. Sefer Bamidbar concludes with that very same theme.

The high point that reveals the profound depth concealed within these journeys is found in the two unique *pesukim* enclosed by the inverted *nuns*: ויהי בנסוע הארון "When the Ark traveled, Moshe said... and when it rested, he said, 'Return, Hashem....'"

Our sages, the Tannaim (sages of the Mishna), who expounded on the hidden meanings in the *pesukim*, expressed differing opinions regarding the concealed meaning behind these inverted *nuns*. Some maintained that they designate a sefer in its own right, a separate book, which makes the

Torah of Moshe consist of seven books. Others explained that these *pesukim* were placed here in order to separate between calamities. These opinions carry deep meanings, and we discussed them earlier.

However, sin intervened, and the journey was prolonged. The complaints of the *mis'onenim* (those who complained) caused a brief delay, and afterward the sin of the *meraglim* (spies) caused us to remain in the wilderness for forty years. We were on a direct journey. There were not supposed to be forty-two stops. Moshe was meant to lead Bnei Yisrael from Mitzrayim directly into Eretz Yisrael. Then, tragically, came the sin of the spies, and we became confined to the wilderness for forty years.

The journeys: the story of the Jewish people's faith

Yet despite the sins and the prolonged journey to Eretz Yisrael, the profound significance of the journeys was not diminished. On the contrary: "*mei'az yatza masok*" ("out of the strong came sweetness").

To explain this, let us begin with a question. In Parashas Chukas, the Torah suddenly skips over thirty-eight years of the wilderness period and proceeds directly to recount the events of the final year. What happened during all those years? If they possess no significance, why does the Torah here return to the very beginning of the journey from Egypt and summarize all forty-two journeys throughout the forty years?

The Torah is not a history book. The Torah teaches us eternal lessons. One significant lesson of the journey through the wilderness is that it was a test of faith:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶתְּבִית כָּלִילֶיךָ לְכַתֹּב
אֶתְרִי בַמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה

"Thus says Hashem: 'I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, when you followed Me into the wilderness, into an unsown land' (Yirmiyahu 2:2).

Hashem remembers the faith of our youth, our leaving an inhabited land for a desolate wilderness. Rashi explains: "And what was the kindness of your youth? Your following after My emissaries, Moshe and Aharon. From an inhabited land you went out into the desolate wilderness with no provisions for the journey, because you believed in Me." They took only what Hashem instructed them to take, *matzah*, and nothing more.

אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים

"These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who departed from the Land of Egypt."

They left behind all the comforts of Egypt. Bnei Yisrael were rewarded in the wilderness for that extraordinary trust. They were cared for directly by Hashem, receiving their sustenance, the *mahn*, directly from Him, while living under the protection of the *Ananei HaKavod*, with the Shechinah constantly journeying with them.

The closing *pesukim* of Sefer Shemos testify to this:

כי ענן ה' עליהם משכן יומם... בכל מסעיהם:

"For the cloud of Hashem was upon the Mishkan by day... throughout all their journeys."

The episode of the *Chet ha'Eigel* (Golden Calf) occurred only forty days after Ma'amad Har Sinai (the Revelation at Mount Sinai), before the command to construct the Mishkan. Yet its narrative was postponed from Parashas Yisro for three *parshiyos* until Parashas Ki Sisa. Why?

My heart tells me that the Torah was written in this way so as not to interrupt the joy of Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah) and the joy of the command to build the Mishkan and make the *bigdei kehunah* (priestly garments). On this basis, one may say that in Parashas Massei the Torah wishes only to emphasize the Jewish people's faith in leaving Mitzrayim and entering a desolate wilderness, even for forty years. The Torah does not wish to focus specifically on those additional years of punishment. Instead, it resumes the narrative in the final year and recounts the summary of all forty years of journeys in praise of Bnei Yisrael for their faith. In this way, Hashem demonstrates that His bond with Klal Yisrael is eternal and unbreakable, and "many waters cannot extinguish the love" that covers over all transgressions, and the Beis HaMikdash will yet be rebuilt.

The secret of the parallel between the journeys and the cities of the Leviim

Earlier we cited the teaching of the holy Baal Shem Tov, may his merit protect us, that every Jew must pass through forty-two journeys during the course of his life in order to grow spiritually, corresponding to the forty-two spiritual journeys of the nation in the wilderness. In our parashah, there is a commandment to give forty-two cities to the Leviim. My heart tells me it is no coincidence that the number of Levitical cities corresponds to the forty-two journeys. The Leviim did not have a portion of their own in the Land; rather, they were scattered throughout Eretz Yisrael. It is not a coincidence that their cities also served as *arei miklat* (cities of refuge), where any Jew who killed a person unintentionally could seek refuge.

Because the Leviim ministered in holiness, they brought sanctity to their cities. As a result, these places served as stations of

spiritual ascent for a person who had fallen from his spiritual level and, consequently, had been exiled from his place, requiring him to begin his spiritual journey anew. We see this reflected in the *halachah* that "if a student is exiled, his teacher is exiled with him," in order to assist him in Torah study and the service of Hashem. This is an aspect of the path of *teshuvah* (repentance). Plus, a change of place brings a change of fortune.

Sometimes people move from one place to another because they found no success where they were. They leave for a new place, searching for elevation. "These are the journeys of the Children of Israel...at the command of Hashem." We journey, seeking to find the next stop to which Hashem is sending us. Sometimes we receive an inner "push" to move, to change, and we act accordingly. We travel from encampment to encampment throughout our lives, until we reach the final destination, *dveikus* (cleaving to Hashem).

May it be Hashem's will that all our journeys throughout our lives bring us to the complete redemption, speedily in our days, Amen.



III

The first time the date of a Tzaddik's passing is recorded in the Torah

וַיַּעַל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־הָהָר עַל־פִּי ה' וַיָּמָת שָׁם בַּשָּׁנָה
הָאַרְבָּעִים לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִישִׁי
(בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ) (במדבר לג, לח)

"And Aharon the Kohen ascended Hor HaHor at the command of Hashem, and he died there in the fortieth year after the Children of Israel had departed from Eretz Mitzrayim, in the fifth month, on the first day of the month."

The first time in Tanach (the Bible) that the exact day and place of a person's passing is described is with the passing of Aharon. This is the only *yahrtzeit* explicitly stated in the Torah: the first day of the fifth month, Rosh Chodesh Av.

There is much to contemplate in this short verse.

Why did the Torah specify the exact day of Aharon's passing, something it did not do for any other *tzaddik*, not even Moshe Rabbeinu?

Why was the date of Aharon's passing recorded here in Parashas Massei, in the context of the journeys, rather than earlier in Parashas Chukas, where his death itself is described?

Why does the verse emphasize that he passed away in the fortieth year of Yetzias Mitzrayim?

The month of Av and Aharon's role

In Parashas Chukas we are told that Bnei Yisrael mourned Aharon for thirty days, that is, throughout the entire month of Av.

We are all well acquainted with the spiritual significance of the month of Av, beginning already with Rosh Chodesh: "*Mishenichnas Av mema'atin b'simchah*" ("When Av enters, we diminish our joy.") (*Taanis* 26b). Already from Rosh Chodesh Av, we begin mourning the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, which rendered the sacrificial service, the *ketores* (incense offering), and the lighting of the Menorah impossible.

Who inaugurated the *avodah* (Temple service)? Aharon the Kohen, our first *Kohen Gadol*. He laid the foundation for the *avodah*. Earlier, in Parashas Naso, we noted that *Birkas Kohanim* (the Priestly Blessing) was recited for the first time on the inaugural day

of the Mishkan. On that day, when Aharon was anointed as Kohen Gadol, he blessed all of Klal Yisrael. The concluding words of Birkas Kohanim are: "*V'yasem lecha shalom*" ("May He grant you peace"). Aharon's role was to make peace between Yisrael and their Father in Heaven (see Rashi on Parashas Naso, s.v. "וּלְזֶבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים בָּקָר שְׁנַיִם" "And for the sacrifice of peace-offerings, two oxen," based on the teaching of Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan)

But beyond that, Hillel taught:

הָיִי מִתַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם, אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמִקְרִיבָן לַתּוֹרָה.

"Be among the disciples of Aharon: love peace and pursue peace, love people, and bring them close to the Torah" (*Avos* 1:12).

If this is said of the disciples of Aharon, one can imagine the degree to which Aharon himself loved peace and pursued peace. Rashi describes the extraordinary lengths to which Aharon to make peace between quarreling individuals and between husband and wife. He was completely selfless, and humble, in his relentless pursuit of creating peace and harmony among the people. We noted several times that in Parashas Tetzaveh, in the description of the *Choshen* (Breastplate) and its precious stones, upon which the names of the twelve tribes were engraved, the Torah states:

וְהָיוּ עַל לֵב אַהֲרֹן בְּבֹאוֹ לִפְנֵי ה'... וְנָשָׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת מִשְׁפַּט...
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל לְבָבוֹ לִפְנֵי ה' תָּמִיד

"...They shall be upon Aharon's heart when he comes before Hashem... and Aharon shall bear the judgment of the Children of Israel upon his heart before Hashem continually."
(Shemos 28:30)

All of Klal Yisrael, united together, rested upon Aharon's heart. Aharon's task was to unite all of Klal Yisrael, represented

by the twelve tribes engraved upon the stones of the *Choshen*, which were firmly bound to the *Ephod* (Apron) in fulfillment of *וְלֹא יִדָּח הַחֹשֶׁן מֵעַל הָאֶפֹּד* "the Breastplate shall not be loosened from upon the Ephod" – and keep them close to one another (in the spirit of "loving peace and pursuing peace") and close to Hashem (in the spirit of *וּמִקְרִיבָן לַתּוֹרָה* "brings them close to the Torah") represented by the Hashem's Ineffable Name placed within the *Choshen*, which remained constantly bound upon Aharon's heart as he performed the *avodah*.

In this way, Aharon not only served in the Mishkan, but also functioned as the spiritual guide of Klal Yisrael, seeking peace and unity among them and drawing them close to Hashem. Unity and peace were vital to the Shechinah to dwell within the Mishkan and later. Within the Beis HaMikdash.

This helps explain why our period of mourning begins already on Rosh Chodesh Av, the day on which Aharon passed away, and continues until Tishah B'Av, when the Beis HaMikdash was actually destroyed. The message is clear. Because we lost the values embodied by Aharon, we deteriorated to the point of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred), and as a direct result of that, the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed.

Aharon was our spiritual anchor throughout the forty years in the wilderness

As is well known, the precursor to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash in general, and to Tishah B'Av in particular, is found in Parashas Shelach.

The spies returned on the eighth of Av and delivered a false report that had no substance. On the night of Tishah B'Av: *...וַיִּכְדּוּ הָעָם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא...* "...The people wept that night..." (Bamidbar 14:1). Rashi

cites the words of Chazal: "You wept a baseless cry, and so I establish for you a weeping for generations" (*Taanis* 29a). But as stated, that was the punishment for future generations. For the generation that wept needlessly, the decree was "יום לשנה יום לשנה... תשאוי את עונותיכם ארבעים שנה" "...A year for each day, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquities for forty years..." (14:34). Upon Aharon's passing, it says, **וימת שם בשנה הארבעים** "He died there in the fortieth year." Why were Bnei Yisrael in the wilderness for forty years? Because of the *lashon hara* (evil speech) they spoke at the sin of the spies. When Aharon passed away, Bnei Yisrael mourned him deeply for thirty days because they recognized what a great *tzaddik* they had lost. He had been their spiritual guide. Moshe Rabbeinu gave us the Torah. But Aharon gave us the *avodah*, the connection and guidance that draw a person close to Hashem. He united the people, elevated them spiritually, and blessed them with love. His entire being, served as a counterweight against reaching that "weeping for generations." During his lifetime, he was the one who raised the nation after its fall through the sin of the spies.

The power of the *yahrtzeit*: Be among the disciples of Aharon

Why did the Torah explicitly record Aharon's *yahrtzeit*, and why in Parashas Massei and not Parashas Chukas, where his passing on Hor HaHor is described? Parashas Massei, the concluding parashah of Sefer Bamidbar, always falls out close to Rosh Chodesh Av. This year, when these words are being written, Parashas Massei falls out immediately adjacent to Rosh Chodesh Av. The timing of the parashah and the calendar date awaken us to *teshuvah*, to learn from the deeds and character traits of this great *tzaddik*.

What do we do on a *yahrtzeit*? It is a day of spiritual elevation, a day of celebration (*Hillula*). We contemplate the traits of the *tzaddik* and what he stood for, and we make efforts to walk in his path. "The righteous are greater after their passing than during their lifetime" (*Chullin* 7b). We elevate the souls of the righteous when we occupy ourselves with their Torah teachings and follow their lessons, and they, in turn, influence us with their spiritual power from Heaven. **We must make a *tikkun* (spiritual rectification) and work on the areas of loving peace, pursuing peace, and the mitzvos between man and his fellow.** We must rectify our *avodah*. **Today, our *avodah* consists only of prayer,** וְנִשְׁלֶמָה פְּרִים וְשִׁפְתֵינוּ "And we will offer the words of our lips in place of bulls" (*Hoshea* 14:3). **We must strengthen both our prayers and our kavanah concentration/intentions in prayer.**

Rosh Chodesh is the root of the entire month. Already from Rosh Chodesh Adar we increase our joy. When we were redeemed from Mitzrayim in the month of Nissan, the redemption began on Rosh Chodesh (in the secret of "יכול מראש חודש..." "One might think that from Rosh Chodesh...." See what I wrote in our essays on Parashas HaChodesh and in our commentary to the *Haggadah*).

Today, we begin our mourning on Rosh Chodesh Av. If we can take the lesson of Aharon's life's work to heart and repair the divisions that separate us from one another and from Hashem, we can redirect the course of the month of Av from its very root, so that it will lead to that future Tishah B'Av which will be transformed into a festival. As we complete Sefer Bamidbar, which always precedes Tishah B'Av, we reflect upon this point of transition, as Klal Yisrael leaves the wilderness after its long journey from Egypt. We enter Eretz Yisrael

and build the Beis HaMikdash. Let us do all that we can to restore it. **בְּנֵה בֵיתְךָ כְּבַתְחִלָּה... חֲדָשׁ יְמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם** "Rebuild Your House as at first... renew our days as of old."

We pray that the merit of Aharon HaKohen be a protection for us and that he

serve as our advocate before Heaven. He was the pillar of *avodah*, and he will help restore that *avodah* to the Beis HaMikdash in rebuilt Yerushalayim, speedily in our days, Amen.

ב-י-ל-א ואמן Maharaṣ zintz

PEARLS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE GAON FROM PLOTZK

Mattos–Massei

The opening of our *parashah* deals with the laws of the annulment of nedarim (vows), as it says:

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'

"Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, saying: 'This is the matter that Hashem has commanded.'"

The *pasuk* (verse) then goes on to detail the laws of vows. Rabbeinu (our teacher), the Maharaṣ zintz, lingers on the opening verse of the *parashah* and raises two questions:

1. It is not clear what is meant by the expression **"אֶל"** ["Moshe spoke] **"to"** [the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael] Did Moshe Rabbeinu speak to the heads of the tribes, or to Bnei Yisrael?
2. The expression **"זֶה הַדְּבָר"** "This is the matter" is used here. This expression alludes to the unique level of Moshe Rabbeinu, who perceived his prophecy through an *aspaklaria ha'me'irah* (clear lens)—that is, with complete clarity, like a person who sees reality with his own eyes—tangible reality. As the *pasuk* states, **"וּמִרְאָה וְלֹא בְּחִידוֹת"** "Clearly, and not through riddles." This is in contrast to the other prophets, who saw through an *aspaklaria sh'einah me'irah* (an unclear lens). Thus, the expression **"זֶה הַדְּבָר"** denotes something clear and manifest. If so, why is this concept of the *aspaklaria ha'me'irah* mentioned specifically in the *parashah* of hataras nedarim?

Rabbeinu offers a profound explanation of the very foundation of the *parashah* of hataras nedarim. But a small preface is in order:

When Chazal explain that Moshe Rabbeinu perceived his prophecy through an *aspaklaria ha'me'irah*, the simple understanding is that this refers to the prophetic words he heard directly from the A-lmighty: he grasped and perceived them with complete clarity, not through imagination. Rabbeinu, however, extends this concept to Moshe Rabbeinu's power of reasoning and understanding in Torah. When Moshe Rabbeinu expounded the laws of the Torah and derived one law from another through *svara* (logical reasoning) and *hekesheh* (comparison), the reasoning was so clear to him that it was as though he had heard the law explicitly from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The other sages of Yisrael, by contrast,

could only compare one matter to another in their minds, but even after making the comparison, the conclusion was not as clear to them as an explicitly stated law. In other words, for Moshe, even his derivation and comparison of Torah laws was in a manner of *aspaklaria ha' me'irah*.

We may now return to the *parashah* of hataras nedarim. In *Parashas Ki Sisa*, after a decree of destruction had, G-d spare us, been issued against Bnei Yisrael, it says: **וַיַּחֲלֵ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־פְּנֵי ה'** **אֱלֹהֵי** "And Moshe entreated the Presence of Hashem, his G-d" (Shemos 32:11). And Chazal say in the *Midrash*:

"וַיַּחֲלֵ מֹשֶׁה" "And Moshe entreated." Rabbi Berechyah said in the name of Rabbi Chelbo, in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak: 'it means that Moshe annulled the vow of his Creator. How so? At the time that Yisrael made the *Eigel* (Golden Calf), Moshe stood entreating Hashem to forgive them. Hashem said, "Moshe, I have already sworn: **זֶבַח לְאֱלֹהִים יִהְיֶה** 'He who sacrifices to other gods shall be destroyed,' and an oath that has gone forth from My mouth I do not retract." Moshe replied, "Master of the Universe... You Yourself commanded me regarding hataras nedarim. It is only right that You annul Your own vow." Immediately, Moshe wrapped himself in a *tallis* (prayer shawl) and sat like an elder, while Hakadosh Baruch Hu stood as one seeking the annulment of His vow."

These words of Chazal belong to the realm of *Toras HaNistar* (the hidden dimension of Torah), and not everyone can comprehend or understand the meaning of Moshe Rabbeinu, born of a woman, so to speak annulling an oath of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Nevertheless, Moshe Rabbeinu learned the laws of hataras nedarim from this episode. (Author's note: This requires further investigation, for the wording of the Midrash there appears to indicate that Moshe Rabbeinu derived the annulment of Hashem's vow from the laws of annulment in our *parashah*, and not the other way around. It requires further study.) Moshe Rabbeinu was able, through the power of his Torah, to derive that just as he had, so to speak, "annulled the vow" of the Holy One, blessed is He, so too a Torah sage may annul the vow of a person who has made a vow.

This comparison that Moshe Rabbeinu made was not merely like the other *derashos* (derivations) of Chazal, which are derived through the hermeneutical principles by which the Torah is expounded. Rather, it was through an *aspaklaria ha'me'irah*. It was on the level of something that had been explicitly stated to him by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. After Moshe Rabbeinu attained this understanding from Hashem, he went to teach it to Bnei Yisrael. However, he did not teach everyone equally. Instead, he divided them into two groups: the heads of the tribes separately, and Bnei Yisrael separately. This is the meaning of the verse:

1. **"וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רִאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת"** "And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes..."
2. **"לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'** **אֱלֹהֵי**..."

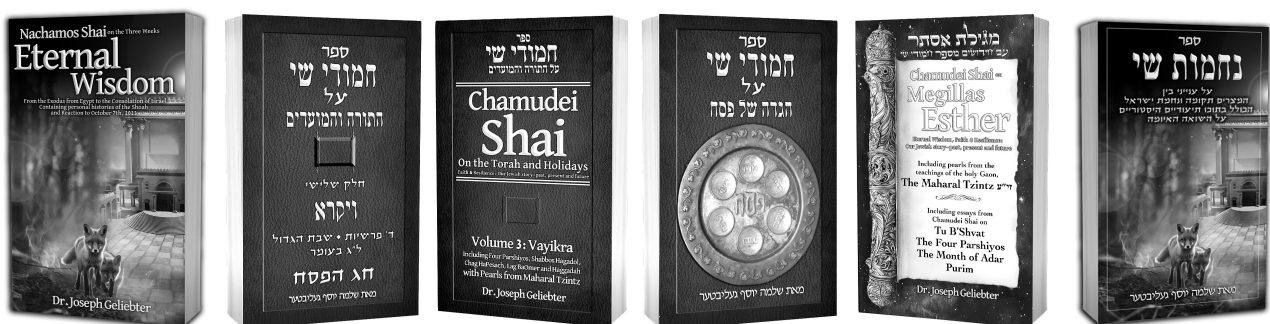
The heads of the tribes were on a higher spiritual level, and their minds were capable of

grasping and understanding the concept that Moshe had annulled a vow of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as it were. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu spoke to them and explained the entire matter to them—that Hashem had sworn an oath, Moshe had annulled it, and from this the *parashah* of hataras nedarim was taught through an *aspaklaria ha'me'irah*.

The rest of Bnei Yisrael, however, were not able to understand, bear, or contain the depth of the concept that a human being could, so to speak, annul a vow of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu did not explain to them the source of the law of hataras nedarim. He simply said to them: "זֶה הַדָּבָר" "This is the matter!" *Thus has Hashem commanded me through an aspaklaria ha'me'irah*. Although he had not heard it explicitly, nevertheless, when he compared one law to another, his clarity was so great that it was as though he had heard it explicitly.

The above questions are now resolved.

1. The opening of the verse should not be read as "to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael." Rather, it should be divided: "And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes," and afterward: "to the Bnei Yisrael." To the heads of the tribes, he explained the source—that he had, so to speak, annulled
2. the oath of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. But to Bnei Yisrael, "saying, 'This is the matter!'" To them, Moshe Rabbeinu conveyed only the command itself, without revealing its source. 2. This is why the expression "זֶה הַדָּבָר" "This is the matter" is appropriate here. Moshe says to Bnei Yisrael: "These matters are explicit from the mouth of Hakadosh Baruch Hu!" Although Moshe could not reveal to the entire nation the specific source of the law of hataras nedarim, the details were perfectly clear to him with an *aspaklaria ha'me'irah*. The derivation by which he arrived at them was, for him, the equivalent of an explicit Divine commandment.



For more information on the Chamudei Shai series, and to purchase copies in either Hebrew or English, go to

www.rlgfoundation.org/publications,

in the US at Stores of Z. Berman Books - www.zbermanbooks.com

and in Israel available at stores of



MANNY'S

ספרי אור החיים
מרכז הספר היהודי הגדול בעולם



- www.sifreiorhachaim.co.il