

## PERPETUAL EXODUS<sup>1</sup>

*These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt ... They journeyed from Rameses, and they encamped in Succoth. They journeyed from Succoth, and they encamped in Etham ....* (Numbers 33:1)

The Torah goes on to list a total of forty-two "journeys" from Rameses in Egypt to the Plains of Moab on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. **It would seem, however, that there was only one journey that took the people of Israel out of Egypt:** their journey from Rameses to Succoth. The other forty-one journeys were between points outside of the geographical borders of Egypt. **Why, then, does the Torah speak of the journeys, in the plural, of "those who went out of Egypt"?**

We find a similar expression in the words of the prophet Micah, who declares: **"As in the days in which you left Egypt,** I shall show you wonders" (Mic 7:15). But the entire nation of Israel was liberated from Egypt in a single day. "On that very day the Torah states, "G-d took out the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt" (Exo 12:51). A few verses later, we read: "And Moses said to the people: **Remember this day,** on which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery" (Exo 13:3). So why does the prophet speak of "the **days** in which you went out of Egypt"?

## NARROW ESCAPE

*Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for "Egypt, means "boundaries" and "narrow straits." On the spiritual level, the journey from Egypt is a journey from the boundaries that limit us—an exodus from the narrow straits of habit, convention, and ego, to the "good broad land"<sup>(4)</sup> of the infinite potential of the human soul.

And **the journey from Mitzrayim is a perpetual one.** What was broad and uninhibited by yesterday's standards, is narrow and confining in light of the added wisdom and new possibilities of today's achievements. Hence, every one of life's journeys is an exodus "from the land of *Mitzrayim*." Having liberated ourselves from yesterday's limitations, we must again break free from the "Egypt" that our new normal represents to our newly uncovered potential. In the words of our sages, "in every generation, and every day, a person is obligated to see themselves as having today exited Egypt."<sup>(5)</sup>

## TIMELY MESSAGE

The endeavor to exit *Mitzrayim* takes on a special significance in the stretch of the calendar known as *bein ha-meitzarim* ("between the strictures" [*restraints, limits, restrictions*])<sup>(6)</sup>—**the three weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and the ninth of Av. *Bein ha-meitzarim* is our annual re-experience of the tragedy of *galut*—our banishment from the "good broad land" and the diminution of G-d's manifest presence in our lives with the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.**

It is no accident that the *parashah* of *Massei* (Numbers 33-36) is read and studied in this time of narrowing horizons and constraining of the spirit.<sup>(7)</sup> The opening verses of *Massei* impart the eternal message that wherever we may stand in the forty-two-station journey from utter slavery to divine expanse, there is always the need, and capacity, to achieve an exodus from all that constrains us, both from without and from within.<sup>(8)</sup>

(4) As the Land of Israel is called in Exodus 3:8.

(5) Talmud, *Pesachim* 116b, as quoted in *Tanya*, chapter 47 (the *Tanya* adds the words "and every day" and "today"),

(6) Lamentations 1:3, as per *Midrash Rabbah*, ad loc (to or at that place).

(7) In the annual Torah-reading cycle, the *parashah* of *Massei* is always read during the "Three Weeks" between *Tammuz* 17 and *Av* 9.

(8) Based on *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 2, pp. 348-354; vol. 22, pp. 260-262.

1. This essay is based on an insight we have discussed before—the occasions in the Torah when the words used are NOT the words we expect to be used.
  - a. Why ... does the Torah speak of the *journeys*, in the plural, of "those who went out of Egypt" when it was in fact one journey, not multiple journeys? (see paragraph one above)
  - b. Why does the prophet Micah refer to "the *days* in which the people of Israel left Egypt when in fact they left Egypt in a single day? (see paragraph two above)
  - c. This essay describes one of the ways these apparent discrepancies can be applied to our lives—even today.
2. *Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for "Egypt, means "boundaries" and "narrow straits." On the spiritual level, the journey from Egypt is a journey from the boundaries that limit us—an exodus from the narrow straits of habit, convention, and ego, to the "good broad land"<sup>(4)</sup> of the infinite potential of the human soul.
  - a. This is an example of the way in which a theological idea is woven into the fabric of the Torah and the Hebrew language.

<sup>1</sup> Yanki Tauber, *The Inside Story, Numbers*, (Meaningful Life Center), pp. 254-256

- b. *Babel* (בבל) is related to the Hebrew root "*balal*" (בלל) meaning "to confuse" or "to mix." At the Tower of Babel, God confused the languages of humanity (Gen 11:9).
- c. *Gilgal* (גלגל) is from the root "*galal*" (גלל) meaning "to roll." Joshua says "**Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you**" when the Israelites are circumcised there (Josh 5:9).
- d. *Marah* (מרה) means "bitter." This is where the Israelites found bitter water in the wilderness and complained (Exo 15:23).
- e. *Massah* (מסה) and *Meribah* (מריבה) means "testing" and "quarreling/striving" respectively. These names commemorate where the Israelites tested God and quarreled with Moses about water (Exo 17:7).
- f. *Peniel* (פניאל) means "face of God." Jacob names the place this after wrestling with the angel, saying "I have seen God face to face" (Gen 32:30).
- g. *Bethel* (בית אל) means "House of God." Jacob names it this after his dream of the ladder to heaven (Gen 28:19).
- h. Deuteronomy 17:18-20  
<sup>18</sup>When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. <sup>19</sup>It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life **so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law** and these decrees <sup>20</sup>and **not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left**. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.
- 1) מוֹלֵךְ = מוח (mo-ach [brain]), לב (lev [heart]), כבד (ka-ved [liver, fig., kishkes, gut], i.e., the whole range of physical appetites and desires that stand in contrast to one's intellect and to one's heart).
- 2) מוֹלֵךְ (me-lech [king]) ≠ כללם (ka-lam [be humiliated]).
- i. חֶבֶה (chi-bah [love, fondness]), חֶבְוָה (cho-vah [obligation]), חֶבֶר (cha-ver [friendship]).
- j. יָדִיד (y'did [friend, beloved]), יָד, יָד (yad, yad [hand, hand]).
- k. קָרְבָן (kor-ban [sacrifice, offering, gift]), קָרַב (ke-rev [draw near, inward, midst]).
- 1) Hebrews 10:19-22  
<sup>19</sup>Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Yeshua, <sup>20</sup>by a new and living

way opened for us **through the curtain**, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>let us **draw near to God** with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, **having our hearts sprinkled** to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

1. רֶפֶשׁ (re-fesh [mire, mud]) ≠ שֶׁפֶר (she-fer [beauty, goodness, goodliness]).
- m. בְּרֵאשִׁית (b'rei-shit [in the beginning])  
 1) The first letter of the word (ב) is only open on one side—we can only know about “things” which are yet to be—not about “things” before the universe was created.
- n. חֶפְשׁ (cha-fash [freedom]) ≠ שֶׁפַח (sha-fach [obligation to serve]).  
 1) שִׁפְחָה (shif-cha [maid, maidservant]).  
 2) מִשְׁפָּחָה (mish-p'cha [clan, family]).  
 3) Deuteronomy 10:12  
 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD ... to walk in all his ways, **to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul ...**
- 4) Galatians 5:13  
 You, my brothers, were called **to be free**. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, **serve one another in love**.
- o. נָתַן (na-tan [give, put, set]).  
 1) It reads the same forward and backward.  
 2) This indicates that in giving, one also receives.
3. "*And Moses said to the people: **Remember this day, on which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery***" (Exo 13:3).
- a. Exodus Rabbah 5:14  
 Moses and Aaron were ... standing at the door of Pharaoh's palace; whereupon his servants came and said: 'Two elders are at the gate.' The reply was: 'Let them enter.' When they entered, he looked at them as if expecting that they wished to crown him or give him their credentials, but they did not even greet him. He said to them: 'Who are you?' They replied: 'We are the ambassadors of the Lord, blessed be He.' 'What do you want?' he asked. They replied: 'THUS SAITH THE LORD, LET MY PEOPLE GO,' etc. Then Pharaoh became very angry and said: '**WHO IS THE LORD, THAT I SHOULD HEARKEN UNTO HIS VOICE TO LET ISRAEL GO?** Has He not the sense to send me a crown, that you come to

me with mere words? I KNOW NOT THE LORD, MOREOVER I WILL NOT LET ISRAEL GO ...'

b. Midrash Tanchuma, Va'eira 3

When Pharaoh saw (Aaron's staff swallow up the magician's serpents), he was amazed and said, "If he were to say to his staff, 'Swallow up Pharaoh and his throne, it would immediately swallow me up!' This was the omen foretold to Moshe at the incident of the Burning Bush. When God said to him, "What is that in your hand?" (He said, "a staff." He (God) said,) "Cast it to the ground. [He cast it to the ground and it turned into a serpent.]" (Exo 4:3) **This was an allusion to Pharaoh, who is compared to a serpent,** [as it states, "On that day, Hashem will punish with His harsh, great, mighty sword, the Leviathan, **the serpent**, the twisting serpent" (Isa 27:1).

c. In (the Apostolic Writings) and some (non-Messianic) Jewish interpretive traditions, Pharaoh is seen as a symbolic "type" or foreshadowing of Satan.<sup>2</sup>

- 1) Pharaoh, as the oppressive ruler of Egypt, holds the Israelites in bondage. **This parallels how Satan is often depicted as a spiritual oppressor, keeping humanity enslaved to sin.**
- 2) The Exodus narrative—where God liberates Israel from Pharaoh's grasp—anticipates the (Apostolic) theme of spiritual liberation from Satan through God's redemptive acts.
- 3) Both Pharaoh and Satan are characterized by stubbornness, defiance against God, and a desire to enslave or deceive.
- 4) Just as Pharaoh's defeat brings about Israel's freedom, so too the defeat of Satan brings about spiritual freedom for believers.

d. 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

<sup>1</sup>For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup>They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup>They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup>and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Messiah ...

<sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did ...

e. Colossians 1:13

"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son."

4. *And the journey from Mitzrayim is a perpetual one ... every one of life's journeys is an exodus "from the land of Mitzrayim."*

a. Deuteronomy 8:1-3

<sup>1</sup>Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. <sup>2</sup>Remember how the LORD **your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years**, to humble and test you **in order to know what was in your heart**, whether or not you would keep his commands. <sup>3</sup>He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that **man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**

1) The journey between Egypt and the Promised Land took a very long time and it was not without its trials.

a) James 1:2-4

<sup>2</sup>Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup>because you know that **the testing of your faith produces perseverance.** <sup>4</sup>Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

2) God "tested" his people "in order to know what was in (their) heart"?

a. Psalms 94:11

<sup>11</sup>The LORD knows all human plans; he knows that they are futile.

b. Jeremiah 17:10

<sup>10</sup>"I the LORD search the heart and examine the ~~mind~~ (lit, *the kidneys*, i.e., *man's inner motivations*), to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."

b. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

<sup>1</sup>There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, <sup>3</sup>a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, <sup>4</sup>a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, <sup>5</sup>a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, <sup>6</sup>a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, <sup>7</sup>a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, <sup>8</sup>a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

c. Pesachim 116b (Exo. R. 25:12)

IN EVERY GENERATION A MAN IS BOUND TO REGARD HIMSELF AS THOUGH HE PERSONALLY HAD GONE FORTH FROM EGYPT, BECAUSE IT IS SAID, AND THOU SHALT TELL THY SON IN THAT DAY, SAYING: IT IS BECAUSE OF THAT WHICH THE LORD DID FOR ME WHEN I CAME FORTH OUT OF EGYPT (Exo 13:8).

d. Galatians 5:1

It is for freedom that Messiah has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

1) **The Torah is not the yoke of slavery—it is the misapplication of the Torah that is a problem and the sin that results.**

5. Bein ha-meitzarim (“between the strictures”) is our annual re-experience of the tragedy of galut—our banishment from the “good broad land” and the diminution of G-d’s manifest presence in our lives with the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

a. The third verse in the opening chapter of *Megillat Eichah*, the Book of Lamentations, states: “Yehudah has gone into exile because of suffering and great servitude ... all her pursuers overtook her ‘between the straits’ (*bein hametzarim*).” Comment our Sages<sup>(1)</sup> “*Bein HaMetzarim*’ refers to the twenty-one days between *Shivah Asar BeTammuz* (the Seventeenth of Tammuz) and *Tishah BeAv* (the Ninth of Av).”<sup>3</sup>

(1) *Eichah Rabbah* 1:29.

b. The fast of the 17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, known as *Shivah Asar B’Tammuz*, is the start of a three-week mourning period for the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Holy Temples.

The fast actually commemorates five tragic events that occurred on this date:

- 1) Moses broke the tablets when he saw the Jewish people worshipping the Golden Calf.
- 2) During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, the Jews were forced to cease offering the daily sacrifices due to the lack of sheep.
- 3) Apostomos burned the holy Torah.<sup>(1)</sup>
- 4) An idol was placed in the Holy Temple.<sup>(2)</sup>
- 5) **The walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans**, in 69 CE, after a lengthy siege. (Three weeks later, after the Jews put up a valiant struggle, the Romans destroyed the second Holy Temple on the 9th of Av.)

The Jerusalem Talmud maintains that this is also the date when the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem on their way to destroying the first Temple.

- (1) Historians have long debated when this occurred: some maintain that Apostomos was a general during the Roman occupation of Israel, while others contend that he lived years earlier and was an officer during the Greek reign over the Holy Land. For a full treatment of this question see: Who Was Apostomus, Who Burned a Torah Scroll?
- (2) This event is also shrouded in controversy: some say that this too was done by Apostomos, while others say that this was done by King Manasseh of Judea.

c. Tisha B’Av, the 9th day of the month of Av (August 2-3, 2025), is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar, on which we fast, deprive ourselves and pray. It is the culmination of the Three Weeks, a period of time during which we mark the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

- 1) The spies returned from the Promised Land with frightening reports, and the Israelites balked at the prospect of entering the land. G-d decreed that they would therefore wander in the desert for 40 years (Num 13:32, 14:20-25).
- 2) Both Holy Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed on this date. The First Temple was burned by the Babylonians ... and the Second Temple fell to the Romans ... unleashing a period of suffering from which our nation has never fully recovered.
- 3) The Bar Kochba revolt against the Romans in 133 CE ended in defeat: The Jews of Betar were butchered on the 9th of Av and the Temple Mount was plowed one year later on the same date.
- 4) Later on in our history, many more tragedies happened on this day, including the 1290 expulsion of England’s Jews and the 1492 banishment of all Jews from Spain..

6. *It is no accident that the parashah of Massei (Numbers 33-36) is read and studied in this time of narrowing horizons and constraining of the spirit. The opening verses of Massei impart the eternal message that **wherever we may stand in the forty-two-station journey from utter slavery to divine expanse, there is always the need, and capacity, to achieve an exodus from all that constrains us, both from without and from within.***

**Chazak, chazak, v’nitchazek!**

*Be strong, Be strong, and may we be strengthened!*

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article\\_cdo/aid/2300816/jewish/Bein-Hametzarim-Days-and-Weeks.htm](https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2300816/jewish/Bein-Hametzarim-Days-and-Weeks.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/144575/jewish/What-Is-Tisha-BAv.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/144575/jewish/What-Is-Tisha-BAv.htm)