



## The Enigma of the Three-Plied Cord

# 176 Pesukim in Parshas Nasso, 176 Pesukim in Tehillim 119, 176 Dafs in Maseches Bava Batra Negate the Klipah of Aluf צפו

Parshas Nasso is always read in proximity to Chag HaShavuot. This year, as in most years, it is read on the Shabbas immediately following Chag HaShavuot. Thus, it is fitting that we explore the fascinating connection between parshas Nasso and the festival referred to as “zman matan toraseinu.”

Our sacred sefarim point out an intriguing phenomenon. Parshas Nasso is the longest of all the parshiyos in the Torah; it contains 176 pesukim. Similarly, Mizmor 119 in Sefer Tehillim also contains 176 pesukim and is the longest chapter in Sefer Tehillim. Lastly, the longest Maseches in the Talmud, Maseches Bava Batra, contains precisely 176 dafs.

### The Maharal: The Number Eight Alludes to the Supernatural

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by identifying the common denominator connecting these three sacred places where the number **176** is emblematic. In his sefer Ner Chanukah, the Maharal of Prague explains the rationale for this phenomenon marvelously. He notes the formula employed by David HaMelech, Yisrael’s sweet psalmist, in Tehillim 119. It is called “תמניא אפי” (“**eight faces**”), because this mizmor is arranged according to the 22 letters of the aleph-Beis, and there are eight pesukim beginning with each letter. As a result, there are **176** pesukim ( $8 \times 22 = 176$ ).

Throughout his sacred sefarim, the Maharal repeats this fundamental principle. The number seven is related to the organization and divine supervision of nature; this reflects the operating mechanism HKB”H ingrained in the world that He created in seven days. The number eight, on the other hand, which is one more than seven, represents divine supervision that is supernatural. This is why Yisrael were commanded to perform the mitzvah of “milah” on the eighth day. For, in the merit of removing the foreskin which a male is born with naturally, he is capable of transcending the world of nature.

Based on this concept, the Maharal explains why the Menorah in the Heichal of the Beis HaMikdash consisted of seven lamps, whereas the Aron in the Kodosh HaKodashim housed the two luchos encompassing the entire Torah. The seven lamps in the Heichal illustrated that HKB”H manages the world based on the laws of nature. The Torah concealed inside the Aron in the Kodosh HaKodashim, however, reflected the fact that with the power of the Torah, a Jew possesses the capacity to transcend and defy the laws of nature.

To substantiate the fact that the Torah relates to a supernatural existence, the Maharal points out that HKB”H gave us the Torah after the seven weeks of Sefiras HaOmer. After departing from Mitzrayim, HKB”H did not give Yisrael the Torah immediately. Instead, He commanded

them to first count seven weeks (Devarim 16, 9): **שבעה** "שבועות תספור לך". Those seven weeks represent the world of nature that was created during the seven days of creation. Then, after seven weeks, on the fiftieth day—the beginning of the eighth week—they were given the Torah, which is supernatural.

In this vein, the Maharal explains the entrance of Aharon to the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom HaKippurim (Vayikra 16, 3): **"בזאת יבוא אהרן אל הקודש"—with this shall Aharon come into the Sanctuary.** They expounded in the Midrash (V.R. 21, 5): **"With this" ("b'zot")—in the merit of the "milah," of which it says** (Bereishis 17, 10): **"This ('zot') is My covenant which you shall keep."** Here is his explanation: **It is not appropriate for a corporeal human being to enter a place that is the holiest of the holy—distinct from the physical and the material—unless he has undergone the "milah," which is also above the realm of nature. In this merit, he was permitted to enter the Kodesh HaKodashim, which is characterized by a degree of holiness distinct from the realm of nature.**

Although, it is obvious that the Torah is supernatural, nevertheless we can bring further corroboration from the Midrash (B.R. 1, 1) related to the first passuk in the Torah (ibid. 1, 1): **"בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ": HKB"H would peer in the Torah and create the world. Therefore, the Torah said, "Bereishis (with 'Reishis') G-d created"—and "Reishis" refers to nothing other than the Torah.** Based on this, the passuk states that with the Torah, which is called "Reishis," G-d created the heavens and the earth.

A similar teaching appears in the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 161b): **"קודשא בריך הוא אסתכל באורייתא וברא עלמא."** Now, since the entire natural world was created with the Torah, clearly the Torah itself is above the realm of nature. This explains very nicely the claim of Onkelos the Proselyte to the Caesar Hadrian that only someone who has performed the mitzvah of "milah"—enabling him to transcend the realm of nature—is capable of attaining the chochmah of the Torah—which transcends nature.

## Mizmor 119 Highlights the Fact that the Torah Transcends Nature

The Maharal explains the insightful, meaningful structure employed by David HaMelech, a"h, to compose Mizmor 119. The fact that every letter of the aleph-Beis begins eight distinct pesukim teaches us that the holy Torah is above the realm of nature. As pointed out, this is why the Torah was given to Yisrael after the seven weeks of the Sefirah—alluding to the natural order of the universe based on the number seven—at the beginning of the eighth week, on Chag HaShavuot, which transcends nature. Thus, there are precisely **176** pesukim in the mizmor called **Eight Faces**, because it is based on a formula of twenty-two and eight—the **22** letters of the Torah, and the number **8** symbolizing the supernatural. David HaMelech composed and arranged this mizmor to highlight the fact that the Torah transcends nature.

This goes hand-in-hand marvelously with HKB"H's pronouncement to Yisrael (Kiddushin 30b): **"בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו"—My son, I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.** Now, the Gemara teaches us that the yetzer hara has seven appellations (Succah 52a): **"שבעה שמות יש לו ליצר הרע."** The Maharsha and the Rama (Toras HaOlah, part 2, chapter 9) explain that these appellations represent the seven forces of the yetzer hara corresponding to the seven days of creation.

This explains beautifully the statement in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): **"יצרו של אדם מתחדש עליו בכל יום, שנאמר רק רע יצרו של אדם מתחדש עליו בכל יום, שנאמר רק רע"—a man's yetzer revitalizes itself against him every day, as it is stated** (Bereishis 6, 5): **"Only evil the entire day."** The words **"בכל יום"** emphasize that the yetzer hara renews its battle against a Jew 24/7. On each of the seven days of the week, the yetzer hara empowers one of its seven forces of tumah, associated with one of its seven names, related to that specific day. Man's only recourse is to study Torah, which transcends the qualities implanted in nature during the seven days of creation.

Let us now interpret HKB”H’s pronouncement: **“My son, I have created the yetzer hara”** with seven distinct names corresponding to the seven days of creation; as such, its power is limited to the realm of nature. However, **“I have created Torah as its antidote.”** This is evident from the fact that the Torah was given to Yisrael after the seven weeks of Sefiras HaOmer. Thus, it reflects the qualities of the number eight, indicating that it transcends the world of nature associated with the number seven. Therefore, the kedushah of the Torah possesses the power to overcome and eliminate the yetzer hara, whose power and seven names are limited to the realm of nature created during the seven days of creation.

This reinforces magnificently the rationale for reading parshas Nasso with precisely **176** pesukim in conjunction with “zman matan toraseinu.” This highlights the fact that HKB”H gave us the Torah after the seven weeks of the Sefirah have been completed, because it possesses the qualities of the number eight—it is not limited to the realm of nature. Thus, these **176 (22x8)** pesukim represent the 22 letters of the Torah, which each encompass the qualities of the number eight. Clearly, this ties in fantastically with the **176** pesukim composed by David HaMelech in Mizmor 119—**“תמניא אפי”**—which is also based on 22 letters with each one comprised of eight. Thus, parshas Nasso is testimony to the fact that in the merit of the holy Torah, which we just received on Chag HaShavuot, which transcends nature, we possess the ability to overcome the yetzer hara with its seven forces, which can only operate within the confines of nature. They cannot operate in the world of Torah, which is above the realm of nature.

### Three Masechtos Corresponding to Three Batei Mikdash

Continuing on this sacred journey, we will now explain the rationale for having **176** dafs in Maseches Bava Batra. As we know, there are three consecutive masechtos called Bava—**Bava Kama, Bava Metziah, and Bava Batra**. We can suggest that they allude to the three Batei Mikdash. For, we have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 9b):

“מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב, מפני שלשה דברים שהיו בו עבודה זרה וגלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים... אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ומצוות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה חרב, מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם, ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות עבודה זרה גלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים.”

The first Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because the people were guilty of the three cardinal sins—avodah zarah, immorality and murder. These sins were not prevalent during the times of the second Beis HaMikdash; the people of that period engaged in Torah-study and performed mitzvos and acts of kindness. The second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of “sin’as chinam”—baseless hatred. This teaches us that “sin’as chinam” is equivalent to the three cardinal sins.

Let us posit that **Bava Kama** corresponds to the first Beis HaMikdash, which was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins. Hence, Rabeinu HaKadosh opens the Maseches with the teaching: **ארבעה אבות נזיקין השור והבור והמבעה וההבער—the four principal causes of damage are the ox, the pit, the crop-destroying animal (“mav’eh”) and fire.** According to the Megaleh Amukos, they represent four forces of tumah, which respectively oppose the four letters of the blessed name **Havaya**. These four forces of tumah caused Yisrael to sin during that era resulting in the churban of the first Beis HaMikdash.

We can posit that **Bava Metziah** corresponds to the second Beis HaMikdash, which was destroyed because of the sin of “sin’as chinam.” Hence, Rabeinu HaKadosh opened the Maseches with the Mishnah: **שנים אוחזין בטלית, זה אומר אני מציאתי וזה אומר אני מצאתי, זה אומר כולה שלי וזה אומר כולה שלי—two litigants come to “beit-din” holding a garment; this one says, “I found it first,” and this one says, “I found it first”; this one says, “It is all mine,” and this one says, “It is all mine.”** With this case, he was alluding to “sin’as chinam” and its attendant controversy.

This brings us to **Bava Batra** corresponding to the third Beis HaMikdash, which is destined to be built in the merit of “ahavah” and “achdut” among Yisrael. Hence, Rabeinu HaKadosh opens the Maseches with the Mishnah: **השותפין שרצו לעשות מחיצה בחצר בונין את הכותל באמצע—partners who agreed to make a partition in a courtyard must build**



**the wall in the center.** Rashi explains that half of the thickness of the partition must be on each partner's side of the courtyard. Thus, Rabeinu HaKadosh was alluding to the attribute of "achdut"—unity and harmony—associated with a good partnership. Even when they build a partition designating each one's private property, they agree to build it together with each one providing his fair share.

Elsewhere, we learn in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 97a): **"שית אלפי שני הוּוּ עֵלְמָא וְחַד חֲרֹב"**—**the world will exist for six thousand years, and it will be destroyed for one thousand years.** In other words, Olam HaBa will only come to be after this world has existed for seven thousand years. This is because in Olam HaBa, divine supervision based on the laws of nature will be annulled totally, and divine supervision will be based totally on the number eight; it will be supernatural.

For this reason (Berachos 17a): **"הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא אֵין בּוֹ לֹא אֲכִילָה וְלֹא שְׁתִּיָּה וְלֹא פְרִיָּה וְרִבְיָה וְלֹא מִשָּׂא וּמִתֵּן וְלֹא קְנָאָה וְלֹא שְׂנָאָה וְלֹא תַחְרוּת, אֲלֵא צְדִיקִים יוֹשְׁבִין וְעִטְרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרָאשֵׁיהֶם וְנִהְנִים מִזֵּיוֹ הַשְּׁכִינָה."** **In Olam HaBa, there is no eating, no drinking, no procreation, no business negotiations, no jealousy, no hatred, and no competition. Rather, tzaddikim sit with their crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Shechinah.** In other words, this Gemara teaches us that le'asid la'vo, we will be privileged to live a supernatural existence without the demands of a natural existence.

We can now appreciate why there are **176** dafs in Maseches **Bava Batra**. As we have learned, this number represents the 22 letters of the Torah with each letter encompassing the number eight—the dimension of the supernatural. This conveys the message that we will merit the future geulah through the study of Torah. We are taught that Moshe Rabeinu does not wish to redeem those who are negligent with regards to Torah-study. In the merit of Torah-study, we will experience the future geulah after the seven thousand years of Olam HaZeh; the third Beis HaMikdash will be built; the supervision will transcend the laws of nature. This is alluded to by the **176** dafs.

## Ben Ish Chai: The 176 Pesukim Annul the Klipah of "אלוף צפ"ו

We find an incredible insight apropos this subject in the sacred sefer Ben Yehoyada, authored by the brilliant author of the Ben Ish Chai. He focuses on the statement in the Gemara (Gittin 57b): **"אֵין לָךְ מִלְחָמָה שְׁנוּצָחַת שְׂאִין בָּהּ"**—**there is no victorious military campaign in which a descendant of Eisav is not a participant.** He writes that this refers to wars involving the nations of the world. He cites the Gaon Chida's assertion that the foremost klipah of the seventy nations is called **צפ"ו**. Therefore, David HaMelech, a"h, composed Mizmor 119 with **176** pesukim, the numerical equivalent of **צפ"ו**, in order to subdue this klipah. Then he writes that this is why the Torah is referred to as (Mishlei 16, 24): **"צוף דבש"**—**honeycomb or a nectar made from honey**—because it is a **צוף** possessing the power to subdue the klipah of **צפ"ו**. (Translator's note: These two words are anagrams; therefore, they both have a gematria of 176.) Therefore, among the chieftains of Eliphaz the son of Eisav listed in parshas Vayishlach, there is one named (Bereishis 36, 15) **צפ"ו**. Thus, we find a descendant of Eisav named **צפ"ו**, which is the foremost klipah of the seventy nations. This is why the Gemara says that **"there is no . . . military campaign in which a descendant of Eisav is not a participant.** It is referring to the chieftain **צפ"ו**, the grandson of Eisav, and teaching us that to quash it, we need the Torah which is described as **"צוף דבש"**.

## The Eleven Spices of the Ketores Nullify the Eleven Chiefs of Eisav

I would now like to present to my royal audience an insight revealed to me by Hashem. What is so special about this chieftain **"אלוף צפ"ו"**? Although he is not the first of the eleven chieftains of Eisav, nevertheless he specifically represents the klipah of Eisav and all the nations of the world that oppose Yisrael. So much so that in our parsha, parshas Nasso, there are **176** pesukim, equal to **צפ"ו**, aimed at quashing his klipah. Similarly, David HaMelech also composed Tehillim 119 with **176** pesukim to quash him.

Additionally, as explained, Maseches Bava Batra has 176 dafs for this same reason.

To address this question, we will introduce an important concept taught by the Arizal in Sefer HaLikutim (Vayishlach). The kohanim were instructed to burn the eleven spices of the “ketores” on the inner mizbeiach every day, in the morning and evening. This procedure exemplified the principle of (Koheles 7, 14): “זֶה לַעֲוֹנוֹת זֶה עֲשָׂה הָאֱלֹקִים”—G-d created the world with corresponding equal and opposite forces—since the eleven spices of the “ketores” burnt with kedushah and taharah were designed to nullify the eleven evil forces of the eleven chieftains of Eisav.

Now, when we examine the order of the eleven chieftains of Eisav, we find that “אלוף צפו” is the third one listed in the passuk: “אלה אלוף בני עשו בני אליפז בכור עשו, אלוף תימן, אלוף אומר, אלוף קנז.” After this passuk, the Torah goes on to list the rest of the eleven chieftains. Correspondingly, here is the order of the eleven spices of the “ketores,” as we mention them every morning in tefilas Shacharis (based on the Baraisa in Keritut 6a): “ואחד עשר סמנים היו בה ואלו הן: הצרי, והציפורן, והחלבנה, והלבונה... מור, וקציעה, ושכולת גרד, וכרכום... קושט... קלופה... קנמון.”

This teaches us an amazing chiddush. There is an intimate connection between the third of the eleven spices—the “chelbinah”—and the third of the eleven chieftains of Eisav. The kedushah of the “chelbinah” burned by the kohen daily annulled the tumah of “אלוף צפו”. Now, it is incumbent upon us to clarify why it is the kedushah of the “chelbinah” specifically that quashes “אלוף צפו”.

### The Chelbinah Represents the Sinners of Yisrael Who Fell Prey to the Yetzer HaRa

The matter can be explained based on the well-known fact that the “chelbinah” was the only one of the incenses that was foul-smelling. As such, it represented the sinners of Yisrael, who had a spiritual stench. This is evident from the passuk (Shemos 30, 34): “ויאמר ה' אל משה קח לך סמים נטף—Hashem said to Moshe, “Take yourself spices—‘nataf,’ and ‘shecheilet’ and ‘chelbinah’ . . .” Rashi explains: “‘Chelbinah’ is a spice whose smell is

foul . . . Scripture counted it among the ingredients of the ‘ketores’ to teach us that we should not consider it insignificant to include the sinners of Yisrael with us as members of the congregation for our fasts and tefilos, so that they should be counted among us.

Along these lines, in the Derashos of the Chasam Sofer, zy”a, we find a beautiful interpretation of the entreaty of Yisrael’s sweet psalmist (Tehillim 141, 2): “תכון תפילתי קטורת: לפניך—my tefilah should be considered as a “ketores” before You: Because our tefilah is accepted in conjunction with the tefilah of the tzaddikim; therefore, we pray in a group—the “chelbinah” (malodorous) together with the fragrant spices. This is the meaning of the words: “My tefilah should be considered as a ‘ketores’ before You.” May You accept my tefilah in conjunction with the tefilah of the tzaddikim, just like the “ketores,” where the “chelbinah” was included with the other spices.

We can now begin to comprehend why the kabbalists concluded that “אלוף צפו” was the worst and most ominous of the chieftains of Eisav. We established that the “chelbinah,” the third of the eleven spices of the “ketores,” counteracts this klipah. We also learned that the “chelbinah” represents the sinners of Yisrael, whom we wish to reform by means of teshuvah; this is accomplished by including them in our rituals, fasts, and tefilos. Thus, we can conclude that “אלוף צפו” is none other than the yetzer hara, who is responsible for there being sinners and evildoers among Yisrael. Therefore, he is considered to be the foremost negative, impure force from among the eleven chieftains of Eisav.

This enlightens us as to why the Chida asserts that David HaMelech composed the **Eight Faces** of Mizmor 119 with 176 pesukim to subdue and negate the klipah of “אלוף צפו”. We have learned that this klipah is the yetzer hara; it has seven names; it is only able to operate and exert its negative influence within the confines of nature. Yet, by studying Torah, which was given after seven weeks, because it transcends the confines of nature, we are able to quash it.

Therefore, Mizmor 119 consists of each letter of the Torah eight times, since the Torah is associated with the number eight representing divine supervision that transcends the laws of nature. For this reason, parshas Nasso, which is read right after Chag HaShavuot—"zman matan toraseinu"—contains **176** pesukim. This reminds

us that studying Torah, which transcends nature, enables us to overcome the yetzer hara that is the klipah of "אלוף צפון". This is also the reason that there are **176** dafs in Maseches Bava Batra. In the merit of Torah-study, we will deserve and realize the future geulah—when we will exist beyond the confines of nature—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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