

ARE YOU TRAVELING WITH HASHEM?

A WELL-DESERVED PUNISHMENT OR A KINDNESS?

In this week's Parsha, the Torah begins by telling us about the travels of Jewish people (Bamidbar 33:1):

אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְצִבְאוֹתָם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן. וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת מוֹצְאֵיהֶם לְמַסְעֵיהֶם עַל פִּי ה' וְאֵלֶּה מַסְעֵיהֶם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם.

“These are the journeys of the Israelites who went out from the land of Egypt, according to their legions, in the charge of Moshe and Aharon. Moshe recorded the starting points of their journeys as directed by Hashem. Their journeys, by starting points, were as follows.”

Rashi cites Chazal, who ask why the Torah lists all their travels, and he answers that it was in order to make Klal Yisroel aware of the *chessed* of Hashem that they stopped and rested from one station to the next.¹

“Why are these stations recorded here? In order to make known the loving acts of Hashem: that although He had decreed against them to make them move about and wander in the wilderness, you should not think that they wandered and moved about without cessation from one station to another station all the forty years, and that they had no rest, for you see that there are here only forty-two travels.” (Rashi)

Klal Yisroel's travels in the desert was a punishment for the sin of the *meraglim*, so you would think that Hashem would have made it hard for them. No. We see that Hashem demonstrated for them His kindness.

THERE ARE NO COINCIDENCES

Every single person in his own life experiences different ‘travels.’ Hashem does *chassadim* for a person all through those travels for which they should make a point of thanking Hashem. Now, don't think that you only have to think about your travels if you were punished. If you have to thank Hashem for kindnesses done while you are being punished, then all the more so, if you were not punished, and you are a wonderful, good person and you were put through different travels in your life - certainly you have to remember and talk about the kindnesses of Hashem! I'm sure in your life you have gotten together with some of your friends or family and you started to sing and dance about your experiences in life: where you've been, what you've seen, what you've done, what you should have done. You think about those travels, and describe them. But the heresy that sometimes comes out from people's mouths is mind-boggling. “Oh, I should have gone there. I went there instead. I shouldn't have gone there. I should have stayed here. If only I would have listened to that advice I would have been saved, I would have been spared.” People actually believe that their lives are all made up of coincidences, of places where they were.

EACH JOURNEY HAS A LESSON TO IMPART

We have over here in our parsha, a description of Jews in their travels. We read about how they went to one place where the water was bitter, and they went to another place where water was sweet, then they went to another place where there was no water. Hashem is giving us instructions through these stories in the Torah.

If a person goes by the dictates of the Torah, then that person is going to figure out the following: “What is the difference if I think that I decided to visit Chicago by accident, or I went to visit Chicago because it's a decree from Hashem? If it's an accident, then I think and I hope that I will have a good time there.” But in truth, if a person decided he wants to go to Chicago and he actually went there it's Hashem who guided him.

A person has to know that every place he goes to in his life, he is able to analyze and say: “What is this experience for? How can I classify this experience?” I went to Eretz Yisroel many times, when it was clearly by the decree of Hashem, and there were many other times that I wanted to go and Hashem clearly said “No.” That's Hashem telling you, that you have to gain something from where you are right now. Maybe there is something for you to gain from that place, but you have to understand there is no such a thing as an accident.

¹ אלה מסעי. למה נכתבו המסעות הללו? להודיע חסדיו של מקום, שאע"פ שגזר עליהם לטלטלם ולהניעם במדבר, לא תאמר שהיו נעים ומטלטלים ממשע למסע כל ארבעים שנה ולא היתה להם מנוחה, שהרי אין כאן אלא ארבעים ושתים מסעות.

A HOSPITAL OR A PRISON?

Just today someone who is close to me told me that his father had a mini stroke yesterday - he should have a *refuah shleima* - and he was put in the hospital in Westchester County. The person was telling me, "You are not going to believe what happened. They kicked my mother out. They gave my father a COVID test - although he had no symptoms - but because it came back positive, they locked him in a ward by himself.² And there was a guard by the door, not letting anybody in (this was a well-connected family). They literally locked the father in jail. The family tried to get to see the father but they were unsuccessful. Finally, they managed to slip a phone to him and he called them up on the phone and he said that they haven't given him any food, water, or any care. So the family made a very big fuss in the hospital. The hospital said, "That's correct, he is on IV feeding." They reported it back to the father and he said, "This must be a miraculous IV feeding, because there are no needles in my arm or in my foot. I am not connected to anything!" Now, this would infuriate anybody!

There was just a famous story with Rav Arye Zev Ginsburg. He told a miracle story. They were ready to pull a ventilator off of him, he was ready to die, and suddenly his wife spoke to her friend who is a friend with the executive director of that hospital, and he intervened and kept them on his case. He said, "I want a report every 2 hours." And they saved him!

Another guy called me up today and said that a woman was very sick, and they came and wanted to take her to a hospital and the lady said "I'm not going to the hospital - over my dead body. I will die right here. I'm not going to the hospital." You know what we think? This guy fell in, this lady fell out and got spared. But you have to know that it's not the hospital's staff who kills. It's a decree of Hashem. (That's not to say that *טוב שברופאים לגיהנם* - *the best doctors are destined for Gehinnom* - isn't true. It is. It is a Gemara in Kiddushin (82a). And the nurses are going with them!)

I was thinking what is Hashem doing here? What is He doing to us? What is the most secure place that a human being has in his life? I used to think it was a police station. And then I found out that they murder people there, and I could be next - they carry guns over there. But I thought that one place where I really feel safe is a hospital. There, you are embraced with medical care. They're going to care for you 24 hours a day. But it's unbelievable what is happening now. I believe everyone was certain that the hospital is a fortress, the safest place to be. Now, I believe that everybody learned that it's a nightmare, it's like going to a jail in a communist Russia, because they keep you in, you can't get out, and they don't feed you. My brother, who got COVID in Philadelphia, told me that they weren't feeding him in the hospital because he couldn't get to the food since they left it outside the room and he had no strength to get out of his bed. One day somebody who worked in the hospital looked at his name tag and saw the name Brog. She said, "Rabbi Brog?" "Yeah." And she said, "I will take care of you from now on. I will have your food delivered to you from now on." It was decreed by Hashem! Don't get angry at the hospital. Hashem is teaching us a tremendous lesson!

WE SHOULD DIRECT OUR PLEADING TO HASHEM

Somebody asked me, "What should I have done when I was locked in the room?" I said to him, "You should have turned to Hashem, like Tzidkiyahu who received the prophecy from another prophet that he was going to die from this illness, "Hashem gave me a message to tell you you're not going to live. You are finished." Is there anything worse than that? You know what Tzidkiyahu said? "I have a tradition from my great-grandfather that if I turn to Hashem, I could plead my case!" So he turned to the wall from his bed and he pleaded with Hashem with all his heart (Isaiah 38:1-2).

I was just *menachem ovel* a doctor, who lost his father this week from the coronavirus. He told me how his father, who was hospitalized in South Africa, called him and said, "I have no food or drink, and I'm dying to go to the bathroom, I cannot go to the bathroom." So his son asked him, "Don't you have a bedpan?" His father said, "I can't move. I need help." Can you imagine this? His son, the doctor, who himself was getting cancer treatment at the time when his father called him, said, "My head was spinning from all this news." He said to me, "I called the hospital in South Africa and I spoke to everyone. And no one could figure out where my father was located and my father also didn't know where he was located." (The father's wife died last week, that's why no one could come to help him.) So until they figured out who he was talking about it was quite a while. And then, they put the phone down on the table, he could hear them talking, but there was no one to talk to. He said he was so furious at those wicked people. I said to him, "You are making a mistake, it's all from Hashem." Hashem said, "Turn to Me. Did you tell your father to turn to Hashem? No. You thought that you were going to turn to the hospital." But then you realize you are in the hands of people who are like the Nazis, you don't look for mercy from the Nazis, what you do is, you look for mercy from Hashem.

What everybody does today is they say, "I'm going to call *askanim*, I'm going to call this institution or that organization, I have a cousin who works for Hatzalah and he will sneak in from the window." It's all nonsense. You only turn to Hashem and you have to get this into your *kishkes*. The lady who didn't go to the hospital, it was because Hashem said, "You don't have to go." And the man who went to the hospital, it was because Hashem said he had to go. (They said that half of these tests are baloney, and that people are not even testing positive).

PERVERSION OF THE TRUTH BY THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

This doctor, himself, told me that when he went for his cancer treatment, they gave him the COVID test, and he said "I knew before the test I was going to be negative and I told them I have no doubt that I'm going to be negative." And they said to him, "How do you know you know?" "Because I don't have any symptoms." And they said, "You know how many people are positive without any symptoms?" He said, "You know how I know?"

² This shiur was given July 14, 2020.

Because you want to give me this (cancer) treatment and it's a very expensive treatment, and if my test comes back positive, you will not be able to give me my cancer treatment – that's how I know I'm going to be negative. The other guy who comes back positive, you want to put him in the hospital because you are getting paid a lot more for COVID treatment." That's what people are seeing today and this is the conclusion that people are reaching. These wicked people have 'power.' These hospitals were bastions of our entire sense of security.

People always tell me, "I'm so happy that I'm not in Canada, because Canada is like a third world country when it comes to healthcare." And I tell them, "Do you think there's no Hashem in Canada? You are a fool. Hashem runs the whole world." Sure, I agree, that if you are in a country where there is no doctor, you have to try to find one, but you have to get this point into your *kishkes*.

A student of mine told me about someone close to him who went for COVID testing with his wife and kids at one of those drive throughs, where they stick a Q-tip up your nose and into your brain, and you wait for an answer to be mailed to you. So they filled out the papers and they waited in line. Forty-five minutes later, when they saw that the car wasn't going anywhere and they were sitting in the same place, they said: "Forget about it," and they backed up and went home. Five days later, they got a letter in the mail that all five of them were COVID positive... But they never took the test! That's what it is, it's not real! This is Hashem running the world. You are going to get it if Hashem wants you to get it - no matter what you do, and if were not supposed to get it, you won't get it. Hashem is the one who is saving you. You have to know where to turn to. This is such a test!

You think that the rabbi got saved because someone told the executive director of the hospital? You know how many people tell me, "I wish I had such connections!" You have connections! You have Hashem! If you think that you're lost, you're not connected!

SHIDDUCHIM AS A LESSON IN LIFE

Here's another example, another one of these nightmarish "travels" that people experience and don't like to do. People don't appreciate rejecting others and people also don't appreciate getting rejected regarding *shidduchim*. There are happier things that can happen in your life. Now people want to know, "Why did Hashem make me go out with this person if they are not my *bashert*?" That's the million-dollar question that everyone asks, right? You know what the answer to that question is? What do you think? Hashem is trying to tell you, that if you were to meet your match right now, either you would be not too bright and you would reject her - because you think you can get a better one - or there's something about your behavior that's lacking and you need to have a learning experience.

I knew a guy who was totally clueless when it came to social etiquette. He was an older *bochur*, 28 years old. I told him, "I want you to know, my dear talmid, you don't have any social etiquette, and you are doing everything wrong, you don't know how to talk to a prospective girl. You don't even understand how to impress somebody, you don't even understand that there's a way to show somebody that you are capable of behaving well. You have to step up to the plate. Maybe a prospective *kallah* whom you are going to marry needs this demonstration from you, in order for her to say, yes, and Hashem is making you a better person."

He was fighting with me back and forth and I finally told him, "Okay, do it your way." And he went out with a girl who dumped him right away because he was clueless. Then he said, "Okay, Rebbi, tell me exactly what to do." I told him to get it straight, and practice. And he did. And the following date he met his *kallah*! She was a refined person, someone with social etiquette. If he would have been totally clueless she would have said no. I told him, "You have to learn from this." He said, "What should I learn?" I told him, "That Hashem is teaching you something and showing you that you need to better yourself." That's why the person in between should always ask the other side, "Tell me why you said 'no', so that I can help that young man to learn from his experience."

Now, sometimes they say no (i.e. they don't want to share why they rejected the other party). So usually what happens is that the young man or the young lady tries to come up with defensive reasons (i.e. "I don't have a great lineage, I'm not rich enough"). But what kind of nonsense is this?! None of that makes any difference! Most people are poor, not very bright and not very strong, and they don't have any *yichus*. According to R' Chaim Soloveichik most people are weak and not very bright and somehow they get married, one after another. People have to realize that Hashem is directing you. Hashem is guiding you.

I recently met a young man who went out with somebody, and it was a tremendously positive learning experience, and I was blown away by how he rose to the occasion and he accomplished beautiful things by improving himself as a result of his experience. And if a person were to think beforehand, "Is there anything where I can better myself?" and he would work on himself, maybe he would not need to go out with five people, maybe he would meet the right person much sooner.

A GOLD DIGGER

Here is a girl who's going out with somebody and she's convinced herself that, "I'm looking for a high earner." I once had a student who was going to be a high earner, he was heading in that direction. He went out with this girl, and then he called me up and he said, "Rebbi, I met my *bashert*!" He went to California to meet her, and I said, "Is she a very nice girl?" "Yes." "Is she a gold digger?" "What does that mean?" he asked me. I said, "Does she want to marry a husband with a lot of money?" He said, "Why?" I asked him, "Do you want to marry a lady who wants to marry a husband with a lot of money? Right now you don't have that kind of money, in the future it looks like you will have." He said to me, "Rebbi, she doesn't seem like a gold digger to me. She

sounds so nice and pleasant!” On the way home, as she was driving him to the airport, they were discussing plans for her to come to Cleveland. He said to her, “Are you the type who needs a high standard of living?” She answered him, “I could never marry a husband who made less than \$275,000 a year.” (this goes back about 20 years ago). He said, “Why is that?” “She said, “I could not live unless I make a nice income and I need about 275K.” (She had it all figured out already). They were driving to the airport and he asked her to pull over. He said he had to use a restroom. He went into the restroom and he called me from there and he said, “Rebbi, thank you, thank you!! I was ready to get engaged to her, I thought she was my *bashert!*”

And when he finally did meet his match, who initially looked like she came for money and could have been a gold digger, she married him even though he was in debt, and she didn't care about that. It's unbelievable how Hashem prepares people. So every time you get angry and think, “Why did they turn me down, why did they do this, why did they do that, they don't like me because of my nose, or because I take aspirin,” you should know it is not the real reason.

I knew a Rosh HaYeshiva one time, to whom I said, “Don't take this personally, but you are a little extreme.” He heard that a prospective *shidduch's* grandfather used to have colds often, and he stopped the *shidduch* because of that. I said to him, “Don't take this personally - I don't usually say this - but you are strange.” Afterwards, I thought about it and I said to myself, “You know this was not his *shidduch!*” But the guy, instead of coming up with a rational reason why it wasn't his *shidduch*, came up with an irrational *meshugas*, by saying that the grandfather was a sickly man.

REVIEW EACH STATION:

“WHAT DID HASHEM WANT ME TO LEARN?”

A person who has to learn how to go through your life and ask himself, “What did I learn from this trip? What did I learn from this engagement?” People go to Yeshivos, they go to Eretz Yisroel and you ask them what did you learn while you were there in Eretz Yisroel, and they say, “Huh?” Did you meet anybody, like a Yerushalmi family, from whom you learned an inside view, something about that lifestyle that makes them authentic? “No,” they say, “These people are *schnorrers*, forget about them, that's not for me.” I tell him, “You were such a fool, you will see things in that family that you will never see in America! I did not tell you that you should become one of them, I told you to get an experience of seeing and learning from them.” No, but they got to experience a fancy orange or carrot drink on Malchei Yisroel. Is that what Hashem sent you to Israel for?! Every situation you are in, you have to realize it is from Hashem and you have to learn from it. There's no such thing as a *stam* trip.

I once heard this from Rav Steinman who was talking about this, and he pointed out that people think that big travels are from Hashem, but little things, like going to the bank or going to the store - those are simple things that aren't travels from Hashem. So he said, “You should know this is a mistake of mistakes! You know how many times in my life I planned to go somewhere and in the end it didn't turn out as I planned? So what do I think - something came up so I changed my mind. No! Hashem changed my mind! Hashem said, “I'm going to help you, I'm going to guide you, I'm going to show you where to go and where not to go.” You have to count all the trips of your life.

HASHEM IS BEHIND US PUSHING US INTO DOING THINGS

My grandfather (Rav Avigdor Miller) counted every travel of his life, every address he ever lived in. I once heard him enumerate them, and I was thinking, “I don't remember all the places I lived in my life!” But you have to think to yourself, what did Hashem do? People think, “I'll go when I want and I'll come when I want.” Is that the *ratzon* of Hashem? Is that how you are going to grow? If a person knows that there's no such a thing as an accident and there are no coincidences, then he'll grow. If they took you to this hospital and to this doctor and you got sick in this hospital or in that city - you should know that everything is from Heaven. How many wives told me, “Boy, I made a mistake by marrying this person. I got pushed into it.” I say, “Really? Did your husband buy you or did his parents purchase you? What market were you for sale on? What does it mean they 'pushed you' into it? Were holding back and then somebody strong came up from behind you and pushed you straight to the chuppah, to the *sheitel macher*, to the gown store?! That's what you're trying to tell me, no? What's the problem with you?” And how many husbands told me, “I was young and dumb when I got married to this girl. If I would have thought a little more I would have realized what mistake I made.” There's no “*al pi Hashem*” with these people. Instead of looking for some kind of “connection” - my cousin is a *shadchan*, my aunt is a *shadchan*, or who knows what - make the connection with Hashem!

I always tell the story about an older *bochur*, a 50-year-old guy, who decided to help people with their *shidduchim*. He started sending out *shidduch* resumes of other people. He wanted to be a “clearing house” for resumes. A very nice *chessed*. And eventually he was *zoiche* to get married! And someone said, “Wow, that's a great idea that he came up with, and that's why he found a *shidduch*, everyone should do that!” (i.e. he eventually found a resume for himself). And I said, “Are you crazy? The guy should have stayed a single guy for the rest of his life, but obviously, what he did was such a big *zechus* - because if you help someone out, Hashem helps you out! You think *you* found your *shidduch*? No, Hashem found it for you.”

Go through episodes in your life and relearn things and ask yourself: “What did I learn from that episode?” Because if you don't learn anything, you're going to have to repeat it. And those episodes come in many different situations, in one place the water is salty, in one place the water is sweet, and in and the other place there is no water.

SWEET WORDS: “LET HASHEM GUIDE YOU”

So let Hashem guide you. Ask Hashem to open up your eyes so you can see the wonders of Hashem in your life, and you will realize you are being guided. A guy says, “Should I go by car for my vacation or should I go by plane?” So he thinks that he's making

a *cheshbon*, because it's so cheap now. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with going by plane, but you should ask yourself, "Is this the will of Hashem or not?"

Here's a young man who's getting married in California, and he was supposed to have his wedding at a very fancy venue overlooking the ocean, a gorgeous, beautiful place! I'm sure the guy was convinced it was a done deal, but before long that fancy location was canceled completely because of the coronavirus. Now they have another venue. But the problem is that California is going to begin a very strict lockdown, so they still don't know where the wedding will be held, and I feel bad for them. I do. If I was talking to them I would tell them, "Why don't you relax, take a deep breath and leave the 'driving' to Hashem." And the guy would say, "But didn't you read in the magazine, that if you get married during the coronavirus - if you don't have a 'regular' wedding - it's not so great for *shalom bayis*, you'll get separated or even divorced?" All these crazy things that people come up with, with all these "amazing" and "wonderful" *hashkofas* not *al pi Torah*, that you read in these foolish magazines!

It's just mind-boggling. You can convince yourself what kind of bad *mazal* you have?! No, this is the kind of wedding that Hashem wanted you to have, that's the best you deserved and Hashem wants you to be happy with your lot! Maybe if it wasn't the time of the virus, you would not have become a *chasson*!

Somebody called me to ask, "Why did Hashem do this to me? I had to get married during the time-period of the virus?!" And I told him, "Because Hashem had to bring coronavirus in order to get you married! Because if it wouldn't be for the virus, you would have still been single, tearing your hair out of your head. Maybe you weren't fit to have such a marriage in the hall!" If it wasn't for the coronavirus - did you ever hear of someone getting married in the backyard or on somebody's porch?! No, I never heard anyone getting married not in a hall! But let's say you weren't *zoiche* for that - it wasn't in your cards - so what would Hashem have to do? He would have had to hold back your *chasunah*!

So the guy said, "I never thought about it that way." I said to him, "So start now. That's called a decree of Hashem!" And now with all these ridiculous and contradictory rules with the coronavirus situation, you should know that only Hashem makes these rules! When you have *chadorim* threatened with being closed, *chas v'shalom*, you have to fight and challenge that, and you have to daven. But, no, they only fight for overnight camps now. Yes, for camps they go all out, but for the Yeshivos I don't see the same *mesirus nefesh*!

Hashem should help us to see our lives as being guided and directed by Hashem, and that we are in the hands of Hashem. You have no choice but to make the right decision and to follow the will of Hashem, and continue to grow and learn from your life's experiences.

The *chessed* that Hashem demonstrated to Klal Yisroel while they rested during their *מַסְעוֹת* in the desert, teaches us that not only do we have to thank Hashem for His *chassadim* during our different *מַסְעוֹת* and stations in live (however uneventful they may be), but we have also to extract life's lessons from these episodes as well. Whether it's an unforeseen trip to an ER, or a rejection during a shidduch, or even a pleasant vacation - these are all "journeys" and episodes that Hashem orchestrates for us, to learn from and better ourselves. And we'd better learn from them, otherwise, the "journey" may have to be repeated! This coming week, I will identify one "journey" or "station" in my life - no matter how small it may be. I will use it, *bli neder*, first, to recognize that Hashem is orchestrating every one of the moves to guide me, and, second, to try to learn one lesson from the journey that I will apply to my Avodas Hashem.

❖ THE BOTTOM LINE ❖

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