

A FRESH LOOK – AT LIFE

by Rabbi Label Lam

They journeyed from Rephidim and encamped in the Wilderness of Sinai. They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in Kivros HaTaava. (Bamidbar 33:16-17)

Why does the Torah bother to tell us, for each of the 42 journeys, where they traveled from? It's always the prior destination.

The Talmud (Shabbos 9A) tells us that Rabbah would begin his Torah lessons with a joke. Part of the reason for this practice was to ready the students to learn something new. To hear a new idea one must be willing to shed some old assumptions. A good joke has that quality of being able to challenge our ordinary perceptions of reality. As we try to make sense out of life or a given scene, we tend to fill in the details with facts based upon our prior experiences. Some of that old baggage may actually run interference with the ability to understand the new. Then we are surprised. Our conceptual boxes are suddenly burst, our paradigms shattered, and in need of adjustment. We are now ready to learn.

A farmer came to the big city to be fitted for his first suit so he could be in fashion- step at a family wedding. He came to a tailor with a fine reputation who took careful note of the man's measurements and specifications before selecting a worthy bolt of cloth. The farmer returned on the day of the big family event to pick up his new custom made suit. The tailor confidently handed it him and pointed him to the dressing room.

The poor farmer was could hardly squeeze his first leg in and then only with great effort again his second leg. He was ready to shout out with frustration when he found himself completely distorting his body only to be able to clasp the suit pants closed. The jacket was equally a disaster. Hardly able to breath, the farmer shouted gruffly to the tailor, "What did you do to me? I have nothing to wear to the wedding tonight! You have ruined me!" Alarmed at first, the tailor took a good look, chuckled, and replied, "Foolish farmer! Before you try on a new suit you must first remove your over-alls!"

Someone coming for a first Shabbos, or going to Israel for the very first time, or encountering a Rebbe has no idea what goodness lies ahead. No amount of words could prepare that person. Similarly, someone transitioning from work to home has to make an astronaut-like adjustment to adapt to an environment with a completely different set of values. He may be the big boss there but it won't work here. When leaving the parental home for marriage the Torah admonishes early on, "Therefore a man should leave his mother and father and cling to his wife..." (Breishis 2:24) He is not

expected to literally abandon his parents but rather to rid him-self of his selfish and dependant attitude.

The best one might do to adjust to the new is to be ready to shed any old and inapplicable assumptions of the past. Then, with the old coat of paint removed, one is more mentally and emotionally available for a new coat, with a fresh look- at life. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.