

WHICH IS THE BIGGER WONDER?

by Rabbi Label Lam

And the Children of Israel traveled from Ramses and they camped in Sukkos. And they traveled from Sukkos and they camped in Asam which is at the edge of the desert... (Bamidbar 33:5-6)

Forty-Two journeys are described in much the same way over and over again. The verse tells us from where they departed and where they settled next. Each time they are described as having departed the last place they had encamped. It seems superfluous to repeat the point of departure. Why does the Torah tell us from where they left each time?

We find a similar construction when Yaakov started his travels. The verse states, *"And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan..."* (Breishis 28:10) Rashi wonders, "It was only necessary to write that 'Yaakov went to Charan'. Why mention his going out? This teaches that when a Tzadik leaves a place he leaves an impression." With this we can understand the import of our journeys.

It was a Sunday morning. My wife and I had just spent a glorious Shabbos in Boston. We had two little boys in tow. We decided to travel north to visit Newburyport Mass. where my great grandfather lived most of his adult life and where I remember visiting him. Entering the city we found only strip malls. I was sure they had already "paved paradise and put up a parking lot". Then like out of a time warp, there it was; the cobble stone street, the lake, the old court house, and a civil war cannon.

As we stood there surveying the area a gentleman approached us and asked, "Are you people-Chassidim?" I told him, "No! We're just ordinary folk." He persisted, "Is there a convention going on?" I thought to myself, "Four Jews is a convention. Five would be an incursion, and six would already be an occupation." I told him, "No! My great grandfather lived here after coming from Russia. He built that Synagogue down the block and his house is there across the street. I'm here to show my children where their great-great grandfather lived, worked, and prayed." The man stood at attention. Real tears streamed down his cheeks and with a quivering voice he declared, "When I see how you people keep your traditions from generation to generation you are truly G-d's chosen people." He backed up respectfully into the day and disappeared. My wife and I were stunned. What was that about?

We reasoned that this fellow just came out from one of those Sunday services where they were reading the Bible which is all about the Jews. However, when they look at the news they are surprised to find out how often those who seem to be the descendants of the ones mentioned in "the book" represent causes that countermand the values of "the book". Something's wrong with this

picture! Behold, onto the Mall in Newburyport, Mass. strides a family looking hauntingly authentic, with Yarmulkas, and Tsitsis, and other dead giveaways. I'm not saying that I am the paragon of virtue but something must have struck him. The "People of the Book" suddenly appear with a loyalty to "the book" and all is confirmed true. We just walked out of the Bible, and stepped down from Mt. Sinai, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, witnesses to the giving of the Torah and all of human history. So it is written, *"You are my witnesses, says HASHEM"* (Isaiah 43:10).

A friend of mine who just came back from Niagara Falls reported to me that more people were staring at and taking pictures of him and his family than of the falls. I believe it. After all, which is the bigger wonder? DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).