

A NEW DIRECTION

by Rabbi Label Lam

These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions, under the hand of Moshe and Aaron. Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of HASHEM, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth... (Bamidbar 33:1-2)

Why does the Torah add a whole extra verse to inform us that Moshe wrote these journeys at the bidding of HASHEM? The entire Torah is according to the directives of HASHEM! What does that piece of information teach us? The Ohr HaChaim explains that Moshe had been commanded to maintain a continuous log of all the journeys as the events unfolded. This is only the final retrospective record. Great! Still, why is it important for us to know that Moshe had an on-going journal of the 40 year of journey of the Children of Israel?

Looking back, it was probably one of the best pieces of advice that I had ever gotten. I was starting a job teaching businessmen in the "big world" "out there". I asked a senior colleague, "Exactly which periodicals or magazines should I be reading to ready myself for the task at hand?" I was a little concerned confronting these giant-men- of industry feeling ill-equipped. I was thinking that that maybe a subscription to the Wall Street Journal or Forbes Magazine might be in order and I was ready to expend whatever was necessary for the tools of my new trade. This Rabbi looked up at me blithely and said, "Know your own story!" I asked him, "No newspaper or magazine in particular?!" He reaffirmed, "Just know your own story!"

How wise and helpful that has been for me for many reasons. I immediately got busy with the unending task of writing what I could recall from the farthest past to the illusive very present. Whenever I would meet someone new the first thing I would tell them would be about me. "This is my story!" It becomes more clear to me and lucid as the process continues. Of course, there's the abbreviated 30 second version and the intolerable feature length 1 hour version. So it is, everywhere we go people want to know your story and to know if you know your own story. If it's a job interview or a shidduch, "How did you get from there to here? Where are you headed? Is it a positive and inspirational story or is it a tale of victimhood and woes? How is it that you understand and make real sense out of the events of your life?"

Rabbi Yisrael Slanter ztl. said that every person is a Musar Sefer-A book of lessons. That book for many still waits to be written and lived to its fullness. The Piacezno Rebbe ztl. wrote in Tzav V'Zariz that a person should be able to write a book of principles that he or she learned from the rich experience

of their life. I saw a keen phrase like this, "The successful person is not the one who makes the fewest mistakes but rather the person that learns the most from their mistakes." One Rabbi had posted with a magnet on his refrigerator the statement, "Our definition of failure is not falling down but staying down." Actually King Solomon had said it long ago, "The righteous one falls seven times and rises." How important and valuable it is to chronicle and revisit the history of our lives, even the difficult and most challenging episodes.

A fellow who had once been in a failed marriage and was dating a young lady with the same life experience felt uncomfortable opening up the subject of her past relationship. He needed to know what went wrong but he didn't want to make her feel uncomfortable. I advised that he ask her, "What did you learn from your first marriage?" If she says, "Nothing!" Move on! It's not possible that somebody went through such a trauma and did not walk out with a pocket full of solid life lessons. If nothing new was learned then it's probably a repeat cycle and that you don't want."

Knowing our personal history is not only an exercise in examining the past. It has immediate impact on matters moving forward! A few summers ago the Lam family went on a boating trip. I discovered in the "crash course" that a boat, unlike a car, steers from behind. Turning the wheel on the deck tilts the rudder in the back of the boat and that's what causes movement in a new direction.

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