

# FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS!

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

Moshe wrote their goings forth to their journeys at the bidding of HASHEM, and these were their journeys to their goings forth. (Bamidbar 33:2)

Initially Moshe is writing about "their goings forth to their journeys" and in the latter section he introduces "their journeys to their goings forth". What is the difference between these two terms? Why is it that the beginning half of the verse is "at the bidding of HASHEM"? Is the second category not "at the bidding of HASHEM"? Are they two different travel logs?

The Kli Yakar explains that there were in fact two distinct styles of travel that occupied the Jewish People during their 40 years in the dessert. One was "their goings forth to their journeys". This describes those moves that were made in perfect concert with HASHEM's supernal guidance, without deviation. The prime example of this was the initial exodus from Egypt, which was a going forth- a launching onto a new and prosperous path. Those beginnings were successful in that they were done "at the bidding of HASHEM". They made real steps and achieved lasting progress in pursuit of the "A plan" which was to leave Egypt, make a brief stop at Mount Sinai to pick up the Torah on the way into the Holy Land. What went so terribly wrong? Why is this historical review happening after 40 long years?

This brings us to the second category which is "their journeys to their goings forth". With these moves they reverted backwards, even looking nostalgically at times o the good old days of Egypt. These backslidings were obviously not "at the bidding of HASHEM". Although they were fewer in number than the positive strides, they were still costly in terms of time and entire lives. Each deviant step and episode of complaining created a different type of detour that ultimately set a whole generation back. As a result a nation's highest hopes and aspirations were thereby frustrated and they were laid to rest in the wilderness?

When looking retrospectively at the paths our lives, we might discern two types of streets, like the two trees spoken of in the Garden of Eden. One is a clearly mapped out and well lit. It is "the tree of life"- the Torah. The other is "the tree of the confusion of good and bad". It is temptingly exciting and packed with experiences, both good and bad. It's sometimes called the school of hard knocks. The tuition is initially free but the bill in the end, like most "pay later plans" is exceedingly high.

Within the first few months of marriage our car broke down and we needed a replacement, nothing fancy. My wife and I found our way to a kindly old man who showed us a ten year old car with less

than 50,000 miles. It seemed in good enough shape. Before going deep pocket to purchase it, I decided to consult my Rebbe. He asked me point blank, "Did you drive it?" I told him, "No! The man could not allow it because it didn't have the right paper-work but he drove it around for us and it felt fine!" The Rebbe told me, "If he didn't let you drive it, don't buy it! Something's wrong! I have an explicit Rashi in Chumash that says "watch out!"

So I bought the car anyway. Everything seemed OK that is until I started to drive it home. On that maiden voyage in the new car I noticed first of all that it didn't handle so well. It felt older than the mileage, so I looked at odometer just to check and I noticed something remarkable. The numbers were rolling backwards. The car was getting younger! Amazing! It became obvious through closer inspection that the glass cover had been removed and the odometer had been tampered with, which is a federal crime. I went back to my Rebbe to ask him what I was to do. I'll never forget that incredulous look and tone. "You bought the car!?" He told me to write it off as "Rebbishe Gelt" - money spent on learning a serious life lesson. Eventually, I did get the money back but not without aggravation. It was a lot of money for newlyweds to lose but with the benefit of hindsight, it was a fairly cheap course in **following instructions!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](http://Torah.org).