

LIKE A GPS

by Rabbi Label Lam

It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people that G-d did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near, for G-d said, "Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt." So G-d turned the people toward the way of the Wilderness of the Sea of Reeds...HASHEM went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so they could travel day and night. HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel and let them turn back and encamp before Pi-ahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-tzephon you shall encamp before opposite it by the sea. Pharaoh will say of the Children of Israel, 'They are imprisoned in the land; the Wilderness has locked them in!' I will harden the heart of Pharaoh and he will pursue them, and I will be glorified through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know I am HASHEM!" And so they did! (Shemos 13:17-22 and 14:1-4)

Here we have the unfolding of an ultra-dramatic "chase seen" which we know ends well. We are granted a perfect insight into the strategic thinking that spared the Children of Israel from frightening disappointment and how Pharaoh was misled and lured into the trap of thinking the Children of Israel were blundering when they were really under strict super supervision and surveillance at every step. We the reading audience have the best human seat in the house to enjoy the ultimate of theatrics.

It's clear to us that the Children of Israel were not real lost and floundering in the Wilderness, but to the earthly human observer, like the participants such as the Children of Israel and Pharaoh and his army it sure felt and looked just the opposite. Maybe that's why it takes not just a poetic soul but a prophetic soul like Dovid to declare with confidence, "HASHEM is my shepherd, (therefore) I lack nothing! (Tehillim 23:1)

I remember it like yesterday although it was more than 31 years ago. It was at an Aufruf at Yeshiva Ohr Somayach in Monsey before the development of their beautiful sprawling campus. We were all crammed into the Beis Midrash for the Kiddush.

Michael, the Chosson-groom was captivating the listeners in the room with his tale of how he ended up at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem where his eyes were opened to up the excitement of Torah life. He and his companion Debra had completed their doctorates in family counseling, although they

were not married, and they decided to travel throughout Europe before settling down to practice.

While in France, Michael explained, they met a little old man on a bicycle who asked them why they are here in France and asserted that they should go to Israel which was not in their plans at all. When they reached Greece where the Mediterranean Sea makes Israel accessible they altered their course and set sail for Israel. While they were traveling in the north of Israel, in the mystical artsy area of Sefad they were confronted by another little old man on a bicycle who suggested strongly that they go to Jerusalem and look into a Yeshiva and discover their heritage.

At that moment one of the most charmingly humorous and utterly elegant lines I've ever heard were uttered by Reb Nota Schiller the Dean of Ohr Somayach Jerusalem who was sitting there listening with his arm draped around the back of the chair of Joe Tannenbaum zl a true giant of generosity and Jewish philanthropy. Rabbi Schiller said to Mr. Tannenbaum in a tone just audibly enough for the assembled, "Joe, you don't know how expensive it is to put these little men on bicycles all over the world!"

Michael and Debra came to Jerusalem, based again on the suggestion of a little old man on a bicycle. He checked into Ohr Somayach, and she into Neve Yerushelaim from curiosity at first. Their touring ended right then and there but their journey had just begun. After a while they were reintroduced. Now they have a wonderful Jewish family.

What looks like a confusion to the casual observer and what feels like chaos to the protagonist may very well be a well-orchestrated and finely directed play. On stage there are all types of actors guiding and prodding each player to their destination just **like a GPS**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.