

THE NEXT GIANT STEP

by Rabbi Label Lam

These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who left the land of Egypt in their legions, under the charge of Moshe and Aaron. (Bamidbar 33:1)

These are the journeys: Why were these journeys recorded? -To inform us of the kindness of the Omnipresent... – Rashi

They journeyed from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho. (Bamidbar 33:48)

Forty-two journeys are spelled out -starting from the Exodus from Egypt until the final encampment in the plains of Moab looking into the "Promised Land." This long list, the winding review, Rashi tells us is in order to inform us of the kindness of HASHEM. If the Torah is investing so much "ink" it must give us pause to think, how weighty and truly beneficial this exercise is.

At the time of the exodus the verse tells us, "So G-d led the people around [by] way of the desert [to] the Red Sea, and the children of Israel were **armed** when they went up out of Egypt. (Shemos 13:18) The word for "armed" - "chamushim" is an unusual term. There is a hint here! Rashi explains that according to the most modest estimate, "chamushim" mean one fifth- 1/5.

Only one fifth of the Jewish People merited the leaving Egypt while 4/5th died secretly in the 9th plague, the plague of darkness. This is shocking news. The celebrated exodus was actually accompanied by a most catastrophic loss.

The Jewish Nation consisted of 600,000 adults-males between the age of 20 and 60 as recorded explicitly in the Torah. Counting females, people above 60, and below 20 years, we can guestimate that perhaps there were 3 million people who actually left Egypt.

If that's so, then 12 million perished and were disappeared during the plague of darkness. What a heartrending misfortune numerically and individually! To have travelled so far in an exile only to be eliminated in the final moments before the redemption reeks of human tragedy.

Now, even after all that, here comes the tough news. Rabbi Aigdor Miller ztl. said that not only at that time but in every generation, 80% are lost to the particular "plague of darkness" of that generation. That is really scary. I appreciate that statistics don't proscribe behavior in advance but only describe behavior ex post facto. Even still, this is a frightening historical trend. How do we make sure that we and our children are not a statistic, going by default, the way of the 80%?

It dawned on me this year at the Pesach Seder an insight about this chilling information. I had to share it then and now. This awareness may just be the beginning of the cure we seek. I came to realize that we are the 20% of the 20% of the survivors of the survivors, surviving selection after brutal selection for 3700 years. It is worthwhile meditating deeply on and sincerely about the price tag of the seat we occupy.

This is not a guilt trip! It's a reality check. We are on "the one yard line" of history after having endured so long and hard a fight to get here. That path to here is paved with supreme idealism, rivers of blood, and yes, Heavenly help. To walk off the field at this point because someone in the stands winked in our general direction is a failure in understanding the value of our current position.

No different than the Children of Israel poised to enter the "Promised Land" after a circuitous journey in the desert, we at the edge of a bitter exile, desperately need to review how we got here to take **the next giant step.**