

DON'T SUE THE TRAVEL AGENT

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This weeks parsha, B'haaloscha, deals with many very diverse issues. A major portion is devoted to our travels in the wilderness. These travels were dictated by the movement of the 'ananei hakavod'- the clouds of glory hovering above the Mishkan.

The Ramban writes how the movements of the clouds presented many tests for Bnei Yisroel. At times they came to a place which, in their eyes, was an unfavorable place to stay and yet, if the clouds wouldn't move, neither would they. Other times they would stop in a place for the night and the clouds would move again the next morning! This was obviously exhausting for them. At times, they would remain in one place for a full day and then the clouds would continue to move. This was even more frustrating because they would, thinking they'd be staying, unload the wagons and begin to unpack.

Now, why couldn't Hashem and Moshe offer Klal Yisroel the bare minimum that we would expect from any competent travel agent - a clear travel itinerary!!! Let us know where we'll be staying. (That way we could check out in advance which restaurant serves the best manna.) Let us know for how long. (We'd know if we should unpack or just dig out our toothbrushes.) Why was there a need for this confusion and subsequent frustration and hardship?

Rav Chatzkel writes that this was necessary in order to clarify for Klal Yisroel that doing the will of Hashem is the only true good. Even if it appeared to us that a certain encampment was a good place to remain, if the clouds began to move it meant, not that we'll listen to Hashem and leave the good place against our better judgment, but rather that this is not a good place! If Hashem wants us to move on then the best possible thing for us to do is to move!

If we could only accept this concept, we would avoid so much hardship! We have exactly what Hashem wants us to have! Not an iota less! Any more is like wanting a sixth finger! Where is there room for jealousy? What is more ludicrous than theft?!

This brings us to a fascinating and unique aspect of our parsha. The recount of our taking leave from Har Sinai and the recount of our groundless complaining is interrupted by: a backwards letter nun, the parsha of "Vayehi binsoah ha'aron... (10:35-36)" , and a second backward nun.

Rashi explains that these 'nunes' are to indicate to us that this is not the proper place for these pasukim. These pasukim were placed here to interrupt between the two recounts of punishment.

The punishment that follows these pasukim- the groundless complaints that led to fiery deaths- is quite clear. However, what is the 'punishment' that precedes them? All that is stated is that we moved on from Har Sinai!

The Ramban explains that we left Har Sinai 'as a child flees from school'. It seems that we felt that 613 were more than enough! If we'd stay any longer Hashem might add on some more mitzvos!

But what was the complaint against us? Haven't we said already that it was the clouds that determined our movement! The clouds moved on so we followed! Why are we being blamed?!

I once heard Rav Shalom Schwadron explain that there was another time that the clouds moved on and we had to follow. After crossing Yam Suf, the sea spat out the Egyptians and their gem studded horses and attire. "Vayasa Moshe es ha'am (Shemos 15:22)" - and Moshe forced the nation to travel. The clouds were moving but we weren't! According to Rashi we were too busy collecting the booty! Others explain that we had seen such a clear revelation while crossing the sea that we weren't willing to leave there. Moshe had to force us to go!

With this we can understand the first 'punishment'. By Har Sinai we didn't need to be forced to leave! Our bags were packed already! We were quite satisfied! **No more mitzvos!**

Those were the two punishments which the Torah wanted separated. Now let's understand the significance of the two backward 'nunes' and the pasukim between them.

The gemara (Berachos 61b) relates that Rabi Akiva broke the law of the ruling Romans, by teaching Torah publicly. When approached and questioned how could he put himself in such danger, he answered with the following parable that compared Bnei Yisroel to fish.

A group of fish were spotted by a fox. "Why do you group together in such a way?", the fox asked. "In order to avoid the nets of the fishermen", the fish answered. The fox then invited them to come live with him on the 'safety' of the dry ground. The fish scornfully answered, "If we are afraid when we are in a place where we can survive, how much more afraid should we be in a place of sure death!".

Rabbi Akiva explained that if we are in a state of danger when we're connected to our Torah life source, how much of a greater state of danger will we be in if we'd disconnect ourselves from that lifeline!

The Kli Yakar explains that the word 'nune' means fish. A fish naturally turns toward the water. It doesn't turn its back on its life providing environment. However, we Bnei Yisroel, by gladly leaving Har Sinai, did turn our back on our life source! We acted as a backward 'nune' - a backward fish! A fish that moved from its life source! That is why these pasukim are surrounded by backward 'nunes'.

What is stated in these pasukim? "And it was when the Aron traveled...(10:35)". The Kli Yakar explains that even when we are turning away from Hashem, the Aron is traveling in front, clearing the way for us! While we are turning from Hashem, he is actively involved in benefiting us!

This is, unfortunately, a recurring theme with us. Simultaneous to our doing an aveira (sin), the miracle of life is being granted to us!

The world was not set into motion to then continue automatically as such. Hashem needs to recreate this world every second. As we say in davening, "hamechadesh b'tuvo b'chol yom tomid ma'aseh breishis", He daily and constantly renews the act of creation. While we misuse the opportunities of this world to distance ourselves from Hashem, He, through His patience and kindness, recreates this world during those very moments!

May we recognize that all of our 'encampments' throughout life, planned by 'the Supreme travel agent', are the best possible environments for us. May we maximize those opportunities to turn to our life source, soaking in the waters of our eternity.

Good shabbos.

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