

THE MISSING 18 MONTHS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Let us imagine for a moment that the Jews had not sinned with the Miraglim - Spies. Let us imagine that the Jews did not spend 38 years wandering in the desert. How long would they have remained in the desert before crossing over the Yarden into Eretz Yisroel?

At the beginning of this week's Parsha the Bnai Yisroel had been in the desert for over a year. The Exodus took place on the 15th of Nissan, 2448. Seven weeks later, on the 6th of Sivan, 2448 they received the Torah. Forty days later, on the 17th day of Tamuz, 2448 they sinned with the golden Calf and Moshe broke the first Luchos. 40 days later, on the 1st day of Ellul, 2448 Moshe ascended Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Luchos. 40 days later, on the 10th day of Tishrei, 2449, the first Yom Kippur, Moshe returned with the second Luchos and G-d's forgiveness. The next day, the 11th of Tishrei, Moshe commanded the nation to begin collecting materials for the construction of the Mishkan. The Mishkan was completed six months later on the 1st day of Nissan, 2449, almost one year after their exodus from Egypt. Three months later, on the 29th day of Tamuz, 2449 the Spies were sent on their 40-day mission. They returned on the 9th of Av, 2449. The first three Parshios of Sefer Bamidbar took place between the 1st of Nissan, 2449 and the 9th of Av, 2449.

Let us continue our imaginative rewrite of history. Let us assume that the Spies returned from their mission elated with hope and optimism at the prospect of G-d's guaranteed intervention in occupying the land. Following the report, the Jews would have enthusiastically continued their preparation for entering the land and would have advanced toward the edge of the Jordan. How long should that national movement have taken?

I would like to suggest 50 days; two days more than the seven weeks it took them to arrive at Mount Sinai. I would like to suggest that from the start the Jews were intended to stay in the desert 18 months before entering into Eretz Yisroel. Why 50 days and why eighteen months?

"The actions of the fathers are a foretelling for the children." This is a fundamental concept in understanding the relationship between the Avos (Forefathers) and Imahos (Foremothers) and the nation they birthed. The Avos not only gifted us with the genetic code of our people, they also lived the history of our people. Avraham and Sarah lived the life of the messianic Jew. They recognized the Creator and shared their knowledge with the rest of the non-Jewish world. So too, their offspring are destined to do the same.

Avraham and Sarah descended to Egypt because of a "hunger in the land" and returned to the Promised Land with tremendous wealth. So too their children. Forced into Egypt because of the hunger in Canaan, they left Egypt after 210 years of slavery with tremendous wealth.

As explained in previous issues of the Rabbi's Notebook, the entire set up of the Jews in the desert, their placement and organization mirrored the arrangement of the 12 sons of Yakov as they carried their father home to be buried in the Promised Land. As they did so too their descendents also did.

Going way back to the prophecy of Jacob's ladder we discover other "foretellings" in the actions of the fathers. Yakov Avinu, the Chosen One among the Avos was about to leave Eretz Yisroel in search of his personal and national destiny. In the course of the next 20 years he would grow from the man named Yakov to the progenitor of his nation named Yisroel. His entire destiny as well as the destiny of his children was shown to him in his famed dream of angels ascending and descending a heavenly ladder. During that vision G-d told him that the land of his fathers would become his and that he would return to the land after his time with Lavan.

Yakov awakened from his dream and proclaimed the acme of what we know today to be the Temple Mount as the House of G-d and the Gates of Heaven. In the morning Yakov took the stone that was beneath his head and raised it as a monument to the future of his children and his nation.

There is a famous Rashi on Ber.28:11 that references the Talmud in Chulin 31b. The Pasuk states that upon arriving at the place of his prophecy Yakov "took from the stones of the place and put them around his head." The Gemara says that the stones argued with each other as to which of them would have the merit of being Yakov's pillow. To accommodate all of them, G-d miraculously fused all of the stones together into one large stone. That was the stone that Yakov used the next morning for the monument.

Regardless of whether or not the story was intended as factual or allegorical, the intention was for us to learn a lesson from it. The stone was the foretelling of the Bais Hamikdash - Temple. The Bais Hamikdash could only be constructed if the twelve tribes were unified and fused into a single whole. So too, the Mishkan and the eventual Bais Hamikdash would be constructed through a national effort. Every craftsperson and artist would contribute his or her time effort and talent in the construction of G-d's home.

In many regards, our lives mirror the life of Yakov far more than those of Yitzchak or Avraham. It is therefore incumbent upon us to study the life of Yakov / Yisroel if we wish to discover the hidden revelations of a future that has both come to pass and is yet to be realized.

After surviving 20 years with his uncle Lavan, Yakov began his journey of return to the land of his fathers. He encountered the angel of Eisav as well as Eisav himself and successfully negotiated safe passage for his family. The verses in Ber. 33:17-18 record that Yakov built "a home for himself and Succos - shelters for his animals. The place was then named Succos." Rashi references the Medresh that says that Yakov built a home because he stayed in that location 18 months - a summer, a winter,

and a summer. (In the Middle East, like in LA, there are basically only two six-month seasons, winter - rain and summer - dry). Yakov had been away from his father and mother for 34 years. Fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever and 20 years with Lavan. Why would Yakov delay his return home by an additional 18 months? Why didn't he rush back to Yitzchak and Rivkah after successfully surviving both Lavan and Eisav? More so than that, Succos is located outside the boundaries of Eretz Yisroel. That means that Yakov not only delayed returning to Yitzchak and Rivkah, he also delayed returning to the greater sanctity and protection of the Promised Land! Why?

The key to understanding Yakov's decision is the name Succos. Succos is the Yom Tov following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is a holiday that celebrates the renewed relationship between G-d and us. The basis of that renewal is G-d's forgiveness and our willingness to fully trust His benevolent care. Therefore, we move out of the security of our permanent homes into the relative safety of the temporary Succah - hut as a statement of our trust in G-d and G-d alone.

When the Bnai Yisroel began their travels in the desert Hashem provided the Clouds of Glory to protect them from the harsh elements. Those clouds are one of the reasons offered for building the Succah on Succos. Just as the clouds were clear manifestations of G-d's loving protection for the nation at a time when they were unable to protect themselves, so too we build our own Succah as a recognition of our absolute dependency on G-d, especially at a time when we think that we can take care of ourselves!

Yakov Avinu had just bested both Lavan and Eisav. He had done so with tremendous courage, ingenuity, and planning. Yet, at the same time he knew that every success was really because of divine providence and intervention. However, it still did not mask the sense of personal success shared by every member of his household, especially his eleven sons. (Note their emerging independence in the following chapters.)

Yakov knew that Eretz Yisroel was a place where G-d was more manifest than anywhere else in the world. That meant that it was expected that the inhabitants of Israel would be equally cognizant of G-d's presence. Such cognition must always translate into an awareness of their absolute dependency upon G-d.

Following the successes with Lavan and Eisav, Yakov wanted to make sure that his family and household had the proper attitudes before returning to Eretz Yisroel and the home of Yitzchak and Rivkah. As indicated by the name Succoth, Yakov wanted to reinforce the essential humility that is the foundation of our relationship with Hashem before entering into Eretz Yisroel.

The Ramban points out that during the 18 months in Succoth Yakov continued to send tribute to Eisav. In spite of the fact that he had bested Eisav's angel; regardless of the fact that he no longer feared for his life or the lives of his family; Yakov maintained his posture of subservience and humility toward Eisav. I would like to suggest that it was more a lesson for his teen-aged sons in humility and thanksgiving toward Hashem than a true sign of servitude toward Eisav.

"The actions of the fathers are a foretelling for the children." Just as Yakov Avinu waited an additional 18 months in a place called Succoth before returning to Eretz Yisroel, so too the Bnai Yisroel required a minimum of 18 months before entering into the Promised Land. During those 18 months the Bnai Yisroel were to be treated to a revelation of G-d's loving care as never before in history: food from heaven, water from rocks, protection from Clouds of Glory, and the absolute knowledge that our trust must be in G-d and G-d alone.

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