

THOSE SMALL DETAILS...

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Great projects are oftentimes derailed by small details. The Jewish people are marching towards their goal of the Land of Israel. Moshe tells Yitro: "We are travelling to the place that the Lord has promised to us." The stay in the desert will be a relatively short one, barely two years. The generation of slaves in Egypt is on the verge of becoming an independent nation in its own promised land. And suddenly the whole thing begins to unravel. Yitro abandons them and returns to Midian, thereby weakening the resolve of the people to enter and conquer the Land of Israel. The Jews complain about their diet in the desert, rebel against Moshe, complain against God, become frustrated and depressed and the grand march to Israel is aborted.

Small problems and prickly details undo great schemes. The Torah teaches us that the reaction of even one individual such as Yitro to the grand scheme can be sufficient to destroy the plan. Yitro has his reasons for leaving the Jewish people and returning to his home in Midian. Some of his reasons are truly lofty and spiritual ones - he wants to introduce the ideas of monotheism in his pagan society. Nevertheless, the damage done by his leaving the camp of Israel in the desert becomes irreparable. The Jews suffer a loss of morale and confidence. Their mood turns sour. And when one's mood is dark, no menu or diet is good, no leadership is acceptable, no faith can be sustained. The great opportunity for entry into the Land of Israel is lost for the generation of those who left Egypt. Small details and foul moods combine to create catastrophe.

This scenario is present in all generations of Jewish history, certainly in ours. There are many unpleasant details that darken the general Jewish scene. If we fall prey to those problems and interrupt our grand march towards a Torah society and the strengthening of Israel, we shall also suffer from the loss of exploiting correctly the opportunity presented to us in our time. To see the large picture, to rise above the weaknesses of time and detail and to be optimistic and hopeful - this is the challenge the Torah reading presents before us. May we be worthy of this challenge and escape the trap of the desert that engulfed our ancestors.

Shabat Shalom.

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