

# AS THE CLOUD MOVES ON, SO DOES LIFE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

## Rabbi Frand on Parshas Beha'aloscha

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*This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: # 196, Vegetarianism. Good Shabbos!*

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### The Cloud Moves On and So Does Life

There is a very interesting Ramba"n in this week's parsha. The Torah says that the pattern of the Jewish nation travelling and camping in the wilderness was dependent upon the movement of the Cloud that accompanied them. The Ramba"n comments that it was not uncommon for the Jews to arrive at an absolutely undesirable place in the dessert. At times, they wanted to leave a place immediately, but they would need to stay because the Cloud stopped over the Tabernacle. Similarly, at other times, they arrived at a lovely place, exhausted, and wishing to stay for a long time. Often, after only two or three days in such places, the Cloud began to move and they continued their travels.

The Ramba"n adds that sometimes they would come to a spot, the Cloud would stop, and they would all unpack. Then, the next morning, after they finished unpacking all of their belongings, the Cloud would move and they would have to repack and start travelling all over again.

Imagine such an experience! We know what is involved in going on a trip. Everything is loaded into the station wagon. With great effort, everything is tied down on the roof. When we finally arrive at our destination, we want to at least stay for a couple of weeks!

This is the meaning of the pasuk [verse], "When the Cloud lingered upon the Tabernacle many days, the Children of Israel would maintain the charge of Hashem and would not journey" [Bamidbar 9:19]. The travels were not easy. They were a tremendous test.

However, there is an obvious question. G-d is not a capricious puppeteer who demands that people "jump" for no reason. What was the point of making the sojourn in the Dessert so arbitrary and so burdensome?

Rav Dessler offers a very interesting insight in his sefer [book] Michtav May'Eliyahu (Volume 4). Rav Dessler explains that the time in the wilderness was the period during which the Jews received much of the Torah. Perhaps G-d was trying to teach us the lesson that we must learn Torah and perform Mitzvos in spite of any outside conditions. Many of us say, "If only we had a little more free time" or "If only we did not have to worry so much about making a living..." "If only we did not have to worry about our children" -- "Oh boy would we be able to sit and learn Torah and daven [pray] like we should daven, without rushing through!"

As a Rebbe in the Yeshiva, I must, from time to time, chastise a bachur when he is not performing up to par. I often hear excuses like: "I am busy with school work" or "I am having trouble with shidduchim" [dating] -- if only I had my shidduch and I finished college -- oh boy would I be able to sit and learn!" But life does not work like that. Life is always full of disturbances. We are not living in the Garden of Eden. There are financial problems. There are problems with parents, problems with children. There are always problems!

That is what the Torah is teaching us through the travels in the wilderness. Life in the desert was not easy. It was no picnic. But life must continue. In other words, we must continue learning and living as an honest and dignified Jew in spite of the surrounding conditions.

Anyone who has ever read the history of the Mir Yeshiva during World War Two is amazed. The Mir Yeshiva fled from Mir and Poland to Russia and across Russia into Kobe, Japan and from Kobe to Shanghai, China. They were young men -- single and married -- who did not know what the next day would bring. Bochrin were separated from their families. They did not know if their families were alive or dead. They did not know if they would ever get out of the morass; and if they would, if they would ever get married.

Any "Mirrer talmid" [student at the Mir Yeshiva] from that time period can tell you that in the worst days of Shanghai, the Yeshiva continued; the Sedarim [regular schedule of hours for learning Torah] were maintained, people learned and people wrote Torah S'farrim [books]. People learned Torah in the worst of conditions.

We, Baruch Hashem [thank G-d], have relatively easy lives. Our parents lived through much more difficult conditions than we can ever imagine. They learned Torah and performed Mitzvos in spite of the tough conditions. This is the lesson of the Cloud -- continuing to exist when not everything is provided on a silver platter. Life is not provided on a silver platter, but life, Torah and Mitzvos must continue.

### **"Statistical" Cruelty**

This week's parsha contains the positive Biblical command [Rambam Hilchos Ta'anis Chapter 1] of "crying out and blowing trumpet blasts regarding every calamity that befalls the community". According to some opinions, this law is applicable even nowadays (in the Land of Israel); according to other opinions, it is only applicable when the Beis HaMikdash is built.

The Rambam, quoting the pasuk in this week's portion [Bamidbar 10:9], explains that every communal calamity -- be it a plague or pestilence or locusts or any public suffering -- requires crying out and blowing of trumpets.

The Rambam explains that this is part of the Teshuvah [Repentance] process. When we Jews hear the sound of the trumpet we know that the troubles befalling us are because of our deeds. This introspection and determination to repent and improve our communal and individual ways will eventually stop our misfortunes.

But, says the Rambam, if the response of the community is not to blow and not to pray, repent and think any differently, but rather to attribute the misfortune to "the ways of the world", to statistical chance, to the "realities of life" -- this is *derech achzariyus* [the way of cruelty]. Such attitudes cause people to remain attached to their evil ways and cause G-d's response to be "more such statistics".

This expression of the Rambam -- "*derech achzariyus*" -- has always bothered me. If the Rambam would have called it "the way of heretics" or "the way of fools", I would not have been bothered, but "the way of the cruel" is a perplexing choice of words. What does this have to do with being cruel?

Not long ago, I heard an interesting insight from Rav Nosson Scherman into the meaning of this Rambam. Rav Scherman compared this matter to an intersection in one's neighborhood where accidents are constantly occurring. It is just a terrible corner -- again and again, another accident, another person killed.

Someone approaches the government and petitions that they do something about the intersection. "Put up a stop sign; put up a red light; do something -- there is a carnage going on out there!"

The bureaucrat responds "No, the department has determined that there is no need for a stop sign." That bureaucrat is cruel, because he can stop the carnage, he can stop the accidents; but he is not willing to do anything about it. It is simply cruel to preside over carnage and do nothing, when it is within your power to stop the carnage.

This is what the Rambam is telling us. Troubles befall a community, and the community can do something about it -- because the blowing of the trumpets and doing Teshuvah will cause the troubles to stop -- however, the community fails to do something about the troubles, but rather attributes them to "the realities of life". Such a community is cruel to its own members.

So many times, when we see things go wrong in our communities, we have a tendency to react by saying, "Well, that's just the way it is". That is cruel. This is not the reaction that the Torah expects from us. The Torah wants us to put up a stop sign -- to stop and think and react and try to improve. A

community that fails to react is as bad as the bureaucrat who fails to put up the stop sign on the carnage-prone intersection.

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## Glossary

**daven** -- pray

**shidduch[im]** -- match[es] (finding a match for marriage)

**bachur / bochrim** -- single man / men

**sedarim** -- regular hours for learning (literally order)

**Beis HaMikdash** -- Temple

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Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#196). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Vegetarianism. The other halachic portions for Beha'aloscha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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