

These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael. (33:1)

On a recent trip to *Eretz Yisrael*, I struck up a conversation with a fellow traveler. He told me that, since it was his first overseas trip, he was planning to savor every moment. He looked forward to the eleven-hour flight as another leg on what was supposed to be a momentous trip. He was so excited that he was keeping track of every moment – from the taxi that picked him up at home until his eventual return in ten days. I felt this was an interesting perspective on travel, which, for most people, is something they must endure until they safely arrive at their destination. **Horav Yoshiyahu Yosef Pinto, Shlita**, posits that this mindset plays a critical role in understanding the forty-two *masaos*, journeys/encampments, which *Klal Yisrael* experienced from when they left Egypt until their arrival in the Holy Land.

Rav Pinto begins with an incident related by *Chazal*, whereby Rabbi Yosi, who was traveling, went into a ruin in Yerushalayim with the intention of finding a quiet spot to pray. Eliyahu *HaNavi* came by and noticed him praying, so he waited by the entrance until Rabbi Yosi had completed his service before turning to leave. At this point, Eliyahu asked him, “Why did you enter the *churvah*, ruin, to *daven*? Why did you not *daven* alongside the road?” Rabbi Yosi replied, “I was afraid of being disturbed by the *ovrei derachim*, passersby on the road.” Rav Pinto wonders why the fellow travellers are referred to as *ovrei derachim*, passersby, rather than *holchei derachim*, travelers.

Rav Pinto explains this with a well-known story concerning a Jew from Kharkov whose name was Aizik. One night, Aizik had a dream during which he dreamt that a large treasure was set aside for him beneath the main bridge in the city of Prague. Such a trip was not a hop, skip and jump. It would take time and preparation, but Aizik felt the dream was valid. How could he turn down a large, lump sum of money?

Aizik packed his bag, took along provisions, and set forth on the journey that would garner untold wealth for him. It took a few days for him to reach the spot he saw in his dreams. He began to dig beneath the bridge. Suddenly, he heard the sound of heavy footsteps. He looked up and was confronted by the town’s watchman. He was a giant of a man – someone to whom you would not consider lying. Aizik related the entire story that brought him there. The watchman began to chuckle, then broke out in laughterous glee. “You came because of a foolish dream?” the watchman asked Aizik. “I, too, had a dream that a buried treasure was waiting for me beneath the oven in a small house in Kharkov, which belonged to a Jew by the name of Aizik. Do you think that I would be so foolish as to travel to Kharkov in search of an elusive treasure?”

Aizik saw the conversation turn from foolish to derisive, with ugly on the horizon. He immediately grabbed his bag and left Prague to return home. The watchman, thinking that perhaps there was some veracity to Aizik’s dream, began to dig in the ground until he discovered an empty, rusty box. Aizik, however, returned home, and searched beneath the oven in his house. How fortunate he was to discover a treasure chest filled with an abundance of gold coins.

Aizik's journey to Prague was in vain, when, in reality, the treasure he sought was right beneath his eyes. He did not have to leave Kharkov. The treasure was right there. Had he only looked! Now, was Aizik's trip in vain? No! Had he not traveled to Prague, he would never have met the watchman, who shared his dream with him. In other words, Aizik needed to travel to Prague to discover that all of this time, he was sitting on a fortune in buried treasure.

There are two ways of viewing Aizik's "wasted" trip to Prague. The *ovrei derachim*, passersby, view the journey toward its destination as a mere means, a medium by which we reach a goal. Arriving in Prague and not finding the treasure would have left them devastated. Their trip was a waste of time. The *holchei derachim*, however, look at every journey as G-d's will, something which we must do, a road we must travel. Indeed, sometimes we must travel to a distant land, only to learn that what we seek is right beneath our nose. Hashem has His reasons, and, had Aizik ignored his dream and not traveled to Prague, he would never have met the watchman, who also had a dream. Aizik understood that the journey is part of the goal. It, in and of itself, has great significance.

The difference between the passerby and the one who takes his journey seriously is his attitude when a challenge arises, when an obstacle stands in his way, when the journey encounters troubles. The passerby becomes angry, because he feels that his time is being wasted. The *holeich*, traveler, understands that this, too, is part of the trip's intended goal.

Rabbi Yosi did not fear the serious travelers who might encounter a Jew praying in the middle of the road. They would smile, move over, or wait patiently to continue their trip. It was the passersby, the *ovrei derachim*, who look only at their destination, and thus view anything that impedes their timely arrival and successful attainment of their goal as a reason for concern and anger.

Parshas Masei records forty-two journeys traveled by the Jewish nation on the way to the Holy Land. Each journey had specific significance and lofty goals. The journey itself was as purposeful as the destination was worthwhile.