

These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael... Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem. (33:1,2)

The journeys of *Klal Yisrael* from the time they left Egypt until their arrival in the Holy Land are significant, since the Torah underscores them. The Torah only contains events that have importance for posterity. Moshe recorded these journeys by the word of Hashem, because (according to *Rambam*), in this way, the nation would remember the miraculous events which occurred in the wilderness for all time. Veritably, some of these miracles were clearly evident, such as the Clouds of Glory and the *manna*. As we all know only too well, however, memory fades, and doubters and skeptics are likely to arise and claim that:

A. It never happened; B. Even if it did occur, we traveled near inhabited areas where there was water; *manna* was a natural phenomenon. To remove such ideas, Hashem set the record straight by detailing the entire itinerary of barren and desolate plains, so that the nation will know that they survived by miracle. Furthermore, the *Rambam* adds that the nation was to be aware and acknowledge that every step of the journey was guided by the will of Hashem. Nothing was random; nothing was by chance. Everything happened by Heavenly design.

I think that we can further encapsulate the lessons expressed by this detailed itinerary. “Life is a trip” is a popular cliché: The Torah here defines *Klal Yisrael's* sojourn through the wilderness as a journey. Is there a difference? I recently came across an article that distinguishes between “trip” and “journey,” suggesting the two words are more than mere synonyms. While both describe traveling from one place to another, “trips” are much shorter in duration. As Jews, we must remember that life from cradle to grave is one long journey. To reduce life’s occurrence to a series of trips is exactly what the Torah here is telling us not to do.

While it is true that life has its “moments” – periods of stress, challenge, confrontation, anxiety, intervals of joy, *nachas*, success, celebrations – but these are not isolated “stops” which break our long journey into trips. Each and every one of these “trips” is connected to its predecessor and leads up to what follows. Hashem has a plan for us and, at the end of the journey, if we would be able to look back and connect all of the trips, we would see clearly how they are all part of one long journey.

Perhaps the most critical life lesson that we should derive from here is that everything that has taken place during our journey is *al pi Hashem*, by the instruction, will and guidance of Hashem. *Hameichin mitzadei gaver*, “He guides the footsteps of man” is a verity every Jew should acknowledge every step of the way, even when it seems nonsensical and irrational. Hashem has a reason, a Heavenly reason, known only to Him.

Mutty made the trip every day: once in the morning; and the return trip in the evening. Brooklyn to

Manhattan was accessible through a few routes: The Brooklyn Bridge was his choice. Tonight, it happened to be pouring. He was extra careful. The last thing he wanted was to have a mishap on the bridge with thousands of cars moving back and forth, each occupant having one concern on his/her mind: reaching his/her destination as soon as safely possible. Tonight had been a rough trip. The traffic was moving very slowly due to the inclement weather. It had been a long, hard day at the office. Mutty was tired, hungry and on edge. Bad weather had that effect on him. Suddenly, he saw the slowed traffic becoming slower as each car began to move from the left lane to the right. As slow as it had been before, it very quickly came to a standstill. Finally, he was able to see the reason for the delay. A car was stuck in the left lane; the driver was standing outside of his car, probably waiting for help from the police, a tow truck, or a kind driver that could help him get his car started.

In New York, rush hour on a bridge was a bad place to be stuck before the cell phone era. When one was stuck, he prayed. He was now the driver of the car that was stuck. This had never happened to him before. Actually, it was not even his car. He owned a large construction firm, and, since his luxury sedan was being serviced, he took one of the cars in the pool without bothering to check if it were up to par. Apparently, it was not. What surprised him was the multitude of drivers who passed him, refusing to even look his way, almost as if they blamed him for causing them to be delayed. Finally, after thirty minutes of waiting not so patiently, a kind fellow, from the looks of him an Orthodox Jew, stopped and pulled behind his car and asked, "What seems to be the problem?"

It was Mutty, who could not fathom why not one of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, before him did not stop to offer assistance to a fellow driver. Mutty offered to help, did some checking and discovered that the problem was elementary: the car had run out of gas. Henry had taken a company car without checking to see if it had been filled with gas. A resourceful person, Mutty syphoned some gas from his tank and poured it into Henry's car, and all was well. Henry could not stop expressing his gratitude. He asked Mutty what he did for a living. Mutty told him that he sold commercial carpets to businesses. Henry gave Motty his card and asked him to call him the next day.

The next day came and went. Mutty was busy at home and at his business. He was doing his best to build up his business. A week passed before Mutty called Henry's office. The secretary answered in the usual "friendly" monotone she reserved for callers she did not know. Obviously, Henry's business did not rely on a cheerful secretary. When Mutty gave his name and said that he was following Henry's request, her attitude immediately shifted gears and went into, "Yes, yes, Henry said to put your call through immediately." After some talk and effusive gratitude on Henry's part, Henry came to the point, "Mutty, I cannot thank you enough. It is not how much you did, but the care and sensitivity you exhibited by stopping. You mentioned that you sell commercial carpeting. I am in construction here in Manhattan. My company is presently completing a forty-five story office building. I instructed my manager to use your company to carpet all the offices in the building. Thank you very much!"

Mutty had been upset about the delay on the Brooklyn bridge. Hashem was rearranging his “trip,” on which he appeared to be encountering turbulence at first, but which ended up quite rewarding. It is all a part of the journey.

Rav Azaryah was the son of Holocaust survivors. He lived in *Eretz Yisrael* where he had a small *yeshivah* for students who required a little extra help, love, care and understanding. He was quite good at what he did. When he began having pains in his back his doctors discovered that he had an illness for which the only cure was surgery. The surgeon who had perfected the method was the most proficient at performing the procedure. He lived and worked in Berlin, Germany. The last place to which *Rav Azaryah* wanted to travel was Germany. The horror stories that his parents had shared with him had taken care of that. Nonetheless, after consulting with a number of *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, he accepted their advice and blessings for a *refuah sheleimah*, speedy recovery, and he purchased tickets to Berlin. He did, however, make one critical decision: When he traveled throughout the diaspora, he made a point of not calling attention to his Orthodox Jewish religious observance. (A beard does not call attention anymore.) On this trip, particularly because it was to Germany, he would proudly display his *tzitzis*, his *payos* would be evident down the sides of his face, and he would wear his *Shabbos* frock and hat.

One day, as he stood in the supermarket selecting fruits and vegetables, a distinguished looking gentleman, who was obviously a priest (he was dressed in the entire garb), approached and asked him, “Are you a Rabbi?” “Yes, I am. How can I help you?” *Rav Azaryah* replied. “As you can tell, I am a priest. I am in charge of the morgue. According to the city rules, if a body has not been claimed within 72 hours, the corpse is to be cremated. We have a Jewish man whom I was about to have cremated, since we are not aware of any next of kin. When I saw you, however, I felt that you were Heaven-sent to ensure that this man receive a proper Jewish burial,” the priest explained.

Rav Azaryah was confused. On the one hand, he was in a strange country where he didn’t even know the language (as it was, he was conversing in pseudo English/*Yiddish*), let alone the culture and the community. On the other hand, how could he ignore the *mitzvah* of bringing a Jew to *kever Yisrael*, Jewish burial? This was a *meis mitzvah*, a Jewish corpse who had no one to attend to his burial. First, he had to confirm that the deceased had, indeed, been Jewish. Merely having had a *bris* was not necessarily sufficient proof. He phoned the nursing home where the deceased had resided and asked to speak to the social worker who was in charge of the man’s case. During the course of the conversation, the woman who was (supposed to be) devoted to the patient, intimated disparagingly that the deceased had been a Jew. When *Rav Azaryah* asked her how she knew this, the woman said that he had one of those Jewish boxes on his doorpost (*mezuzah*). This was all *Rav Azaryah* required to ascertain the man’s Jewish genealogy. He now knew why he had been destined to have his surgery in Germany. In this way, he was able to bring a fellow Jew to *kever Yisrael*.