

According to the word of Hashem would Bnei Yisrael journey, and, according to the word of Hashem, they would encamp. (9:18)

Hashem orchestrated and guided *Klal Yisrael's* journey through the wilderness. He employed the medium of the cloud that rested above the *Mishkan* as a signal. When the cloud began to move, it was a Heavenly signal to pull out. It was time to fold the tents and pack their belongings for the next trip. They traveled until the cloud stopped, which was their signal to pitch tents and unpack. No set time was established for how long they remained in each camp. At times, it could be months and even years – or it could be mere days. Regardless of the duration of their stay, *Klal Yisrael* remained prepared for whatever Hashem would send their way.

Sforno underscores *Klal Yisrael's* commitment to Hashem, and, by extension, their greatness. The first point of praise is that they encamped in the place in which the cloud stopped – regardless of the physical accouterments of the area. It could very well be a place of waste, a howling wilderness. They accepted the conditions because this was the place in which Hashem wanted them to camp. Second, they did not just camp with one foot prepared to leave. They settled and waited for Hashem's signal that it was time to move on. Third, in some instances, they would arrive at a lush, beautiful place which appealed to them and was a pleasant area for their animals – only to have Hashem direct them to pull up stakes a few days later. They expressed no complaints, no moaning, just acquiescence to Hashem's directive. They had implicit trust in the Almighty. They realized that wherever they were, and for how long they stayed, Hashem was directing their path. They accepted this without fanfare and with total equanimity.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, applies *Sforno's* explanation to the spiritual realm as well. Without doubt, location plays a role in our spiritual mindset. Some areas are simply more conducive to spiritual growth. For some, a rural area, with its peace and quiet, is more facilitative. Others may thrive on the hustle, bustle and noise of a large metropolitan area. Some need to be surrounded by esoteric holiness, such as *Eretz Yisrael*; while others create their own sphere of sanctity. The bottom line is that, wherever we find ourselves, this is where Hashem wants us to be. This means that we can be successful spiritually in this place. So, we have no excuses. We do not run away from a location, shirk our responsibility, just because we have convinced ourselves that we cannot grow spiritually in this place. On the other hand, if one's family is unable to receive a Jewish education, if they are suffering spiritually, he must consult with someone who can give him sage advice. [It all depends on why he is there. If it was by choice for economic purposes, he should defer to the spiritual needs of his family. If it is part of his service to Hashem for outreach purposes, Hashem will take care of his family.]

I think that we can ratchet this up one more notch. Various geographical places and diverse situations present complex challenges. Economic hardship, health – of oneself, a spouse or a child – social and emotional challenges, all can (and do) wreak havoc on the human psyche and affect

the total person. Apparently, this is what Hashem wants of him. This has become his new place of residence. In other words, one can have it all, but still have nothing. He may present an exterior façade of calm and success, while internally he is churning and on the verge of a breakdown. I recently came across an inspiring quote (author unknown): “Challenges are what make life interesting, and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.” As *Yidden*, we do not require challenges to make life meaningful, but Torah gives us a different perspective on challenge. We do not run from challenge, because Hashem placed us here amid the challenge, which He expects us to overcome. No difference exists between the various journeys which we experienced in the wilderness and the places we end up throughout our lives. A challenged mindset is analogous to an encampment. Just as Hashem shepherded us in the wilderness, He will guide us through the challenges. Our role is to hang on and allow Him to lead.

In his “Powerful Moments,” Rabbi Yitzchak Hisiger relates an insight that he heard from *Horav Shalom Arush, Shlita*, which I feel is worth repeating due to its beautiful message. A *rav* asked someone for a ride to a certain hotel. The friend was happy to oblige. When the *rav* entered the car and sat down in the front seat, he noticed a second steering wheel on the passenger side in addition to the one on the driver’s side. Assuming that the friend had opened a driving school, he wondered why he had not mentioned it to him. “No, no,” his friend explained. “This is our family car.” “I have never seen a family car with two steering wheels,” the *rav* countered.

“Let me explain,” the driver said. “We have a son who has difficulty sitting in one position. This can prove quite dangerous in a speeding car – especially if he is always trying to grab the steering wheel. I decided to install a fake steering wheel with which he loves to play. He is busy steering, so that I can concentrate on my driving.”

Rav Arush gleans a noteworthy lesson from this story. We all think that we are driving the car of “life.” We steer right and left, thinking that we are in fact controlling our destiny. Veritably, we are like that overactive boy who needs to think that he is in control of the car. The sooner we realize that our steering wheel is fake and that Hashem is the Driver and Navigator of our lives, we will be much calmer and happier. We will be able to relax and enjoy the trip.