

פרשת מטות-מסעי

This adaptation is dedicated
in honor of my wife, Devorah.

"אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים
לצבאתם ביד משה ואהרן" (לג, א)

**"These are the journeys of the children
of Israel who left the land of Egypt in
their legions, under the charge of
Moshe and Aharon."**

Why were these travels recorded for posterity? A parable of a king whose son was sick: he travels a great distance for a cure. On the return journey, the king recounts all of the stops made during the first trip – we slept here, we suffered through the cold here, you had a headache here, etc.¹

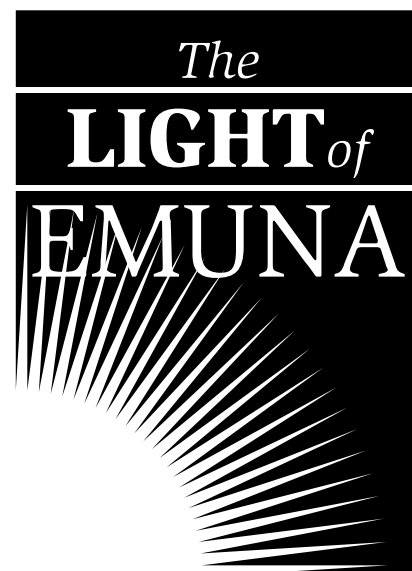
"אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים"
**"These are the journeys of the children
of Israel who left the land of Egypt."**

The amazing journey of the Jewish people through the desert is concluding. It was a long and miraculous voyage throughout which Hashem escorted the Jewish people like a compassionate father who walks with his son, hand in hand, protecting him at every step. One who contemplates the forty years of trekking through the desert is left flabbergasted. "Hashem, You are so great. You guard Your people, Israel, with so much kindness and compassion."

Life is a journey. There are many voyages – a trek to *emuna*, a trip to holiness, to joy, to innerness, to the soul, to all those parts of the soul that we have yet to reach. We are constantly in motion. The holy Baal Shem Tov

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במדבר רבה כג, ג



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

taught that all of the journeys in this week's *parsha* occur in the lives of every individual. Emerging from the womb is an aspect of the exodus from Egypt. We continue on from milestone to milestone until finally arriving at the land of everlasting life. There is one critical element to these travels, upon which it all depends - it must begin with inspiration that develops from this world. Nothing can be accomplished without our own lower stimulus – without our own self-motivation. Only after we perform some act, does Hashem perform His part. That is why Hashem created the world – so that we will draw near to Him. "I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me."² First, we must be for our beloved. Hashem desires us to take the first step, from our own inspiration – even if we are only capable of a minimal amount at the moment. "Open up an opening the size of the eye of a needle, and I will open for you an opening the size of an auditorium."³ We do something, anything, even something miniscule – we begin - and Hashem meets us and performs wonders. But, Hashem wants our initiative first. Begin small, accept something minor upon ourselves and then - observe how Hashem continues it. Hashem does not expect us to bring about complete correction. He merely seeks some lower ingenuity - open an opening for Him, a drop more. He wants us to lift our heads

² אני לדודי ודודי לי (שיר השירים ו,ג)

³ פתחו לי פתח כחודו של מחט ואני אפתח לכם פתח כפתחו של אולם (שיר השירים רבה ה)

towards Him and beseech, "help us Father." He wishes to see how we refuse to despair despite the passage of time without things progressing for us, we enjoy no breakthroughs, and our salvation does not appear. He wants us to maintain our *emuna*, to remain happy, to persistently look ahead, not back. The archetype of this is Rus – she represents lower inspiration. She followed Nomi in returning from Moav – without her husband, without her two sons, destitute, lacking everything. But Rus only perceived the higher pleasantness, Nomi's *emuna*, her innerness – Rus was not daunted by the difficulties – and we behold how far she ascended and how much she attained.

A person must overcome obstacles – never fear the darkness. If a person faces challenges, hardships and nevertheless begins to learn, opens a *sefer* – his heart is immediately opened for him. If despite feeling empty, he begins to *daven* – he is suddenly filled with yearning. We must help ourselves descend from the intellect (the mind) to the emotion (the heart). There is much to be thankful for, must to be impressed by, much to speak to Hashem about. We must not fall into indifference. We tend to view certain things as beyond our capabilities – perceiving them as the domain of exceptional people, those who are more righteous, more pious, and more spiritual than us – not for us. We must have *emuna* that, for Hashem, everything is possible. Even we can attain. The little that we do is so precious and is transformed into tremendous light above. We must build a *Mishkan* in our hearts. We must incessantly cultivate it, expand it and nurture it. And if we do not have sufficient desire – we must pray for the desire itself, beg for it.

"Master of the World, what will become of me? Is it not a shame for all of my wasted days? I want to desire You. How will I answer for myself on that predestined day – for not having sought You?"

In order to elevate ourselves a bit, to inspire ourselves a bit – we are forbidden from being satisfied with Torah novella alone, with only the

theoretical. We must relentlessly seek, with a great measure of honesty, to understand how it relates to us, what it suggests to us, where we are in relation to what we have heard, seen or learned. From there we receive proper desires – "Hashem, help us that we too may merit." We must continually increase the time that we remember Hashem, that we think about Hashem and that we converse with Hashem. We must not become broken by suffering – we must acknowledge that they are Heaven-sent so that we do not forget Him.

We are very attached to this world. We must remind ourselves regularly that we can achieve much more vitality through spiritual matters, from our bond with Hashem.

To begin – we must show Hashem that we truly aspire. Innately, there is no chance unless one craves truth – then there is no nature, Hashem performs miracles. Merely desire, simply begin. There are obstacles? We must not run away, not distance ourselves. All of the obstacles are designed to strengthen our enthusiasm.

We begin with *emuna*. Our entire lives are a **journey in fortifying our *emuna***.

If a person does not gaze towards Hashem, Hashem does not gaze upon him. What does it mean to "gaze" towards Hashem? It means to have *emuna* that everything is with His supervision. All of our anguish, all of our confusion, all of our adversities – each person with his own issues – it appears as if we are trapped – this one has difficulties with his family ... this one has a troubled child ... someone else has an uneasy marriage – whatever one's problems are – they were all predestined – preordained problematically – prearranged exactly opposite of how we feel things ought to be – all so that we arrive, through free-will, to the understanding that, aside from Hashem, there is nothing in this world. We consider ourselves to be unsuccessful, unlucky, deprived, imperiled – so our *emuna* begins to weaken, become muddled, we become resentful. The moment that a person is depressed and

aggrieved – his bond with Hashem is severed, for how can one remain attached to Hashem if he is bitter and feels wronged – behold, it is Hashem who does everything. We must take hold of ourselves before this mindset occurs. We must put every effort into escaping this mentality. We must invest thought to combat it.⁴

How can a person fortify his *emuna* that all matters are exclusively in Hashem's hands? We must accustom ourselves to communicate with Hashem about every detail of our lives. We must take counsel in Hashem as we would with a friend and then we will merit receiving proper guidance – how to proceed and what Hashem wishes of us. When we bolster our *emuna*, we recall that everything is an act of G-d – it is not caused by our neighbors, our friends, our spouses – it is all Hashem. Any unpleasantness with another person is not instigated by that person – Hashem is doing it. If we forget – we must implore Hashem to remind us. “Master of the World, help us consistently remember that everything is from You and it is all precisely from Your love for us.”

We must *daven* before any activity that Hashem be with us, help us, make us succeed, protect us – this instills *emuna* in our hearts. So long as a person is self-reliant, depending on his own acumen and power – he is so distant from holy *emuna*.

The Rebbe Reb Bunim of Peshischa counseled every Jew, so that we will never be lacking and constantly cling to Hashem's service, to habituate ourselves to pray and beseech constantly regarding every matter, large or small. We should not think that we need to don *tallis* and/or *tefillin* to do so. Wherever we find ourselves, even in the market, so long as it is clean, we should entreat Hashem and He will definitely fulfill our requests and we will cling to Him always.

Our *parsha* instructs us regarding the power of speech. A person is forbidden to profane his

words.⁵ We must speak only words of holiness and there are no holier words than words exchanged with one's Creator.

The journey of life is one headed towards sanctity. Hashem obligates us to be holy despite that we are so distant from completion. He wishes us to be holy, as He is. For us to attain saintliness - we must begin with prayer. A person unexpectedly feels the urge to concentrate more in his *tefillos*, to eat a little less, to guard his eyes, to learn to forego, to act positively – these are the longings of the soul that wishes to be free of the constraints of the body. Lift your heart to the Heavens and speak to Hashem. Do not delay. “Hashem, help me change. I can no longer tolerate my craving for food, the slander that I engage in, the forbidden gazing that distracts me from You.” Hashem is not upset by the fact that we have a *yetzer hora* – He is distraught by our failure to plead with Him to help us defeat it. Rebbe Nachman advises that we *daven* intensely over one negative characteristic until we nullify it and then proceed to the next one. Our urges and negative attributes poison our lives.

Moreinu Harav: A person believes that if he did *teshuva* he somehow enfeebled the *yetzer hora*. Quite the contrary, it doubles in strength, causing terrible torture, filling a person with thoughts and interpretations, providing excuses and pretexts. Before a person does *teshuva*, the *yetzer hora* does not bother him as much because he is like a good friend, regularly heeding its advice and following its seductions. Once we decide to do *teshuva*, it hunts us in an entirely novel way, making its presence very clearly felt. It takes on a new cunning never experienced before. Now, it puts us to the real test. The primary challenge is with our eyes. Not just our physical eyes – eyes of jealousy, hatred, honor. We must not have eyes for anything other than Hashem.

To receive holiness we must sanctify our thoughts. Thoughts do not occupy time or space

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באור פני מלך חיים

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לא יחל דברו (ל, ג)

– whatever we are engaged in, we can still think about Hashem. Like the ladder of Yaakov's dream – standing on the ground with our heads in the Heavens. Saintliness requires separation. We must recognize what is relevant to us and what is not. We must love everyone, be impressed by everyone – but there are times and places in which we do not belong. We must transform wherever we are into the House of G-d. If we have “down time”, we must have a *sefer* handy, and, if not, we must silently talk to Hashem. Praised is he who salvages his time, always focused on matters of holiness – time is our most valuable commodity.

The journey of life is one headed towards love of fellow Jews. We begin focused on our

own needs – and slowly we change. Slowly, we learn to think of others, love them, even those that are different than us. We learn to acknowledge good that was done for us. In this week's *parsha*, Moshe Rabbeinu does not lead the people in battle against Midian, he sends Pinchas instead – because when Moshe fled the Egyptians in his youth, he found refuge in Midian – out of gratitude, he could not personally wage war against them.

The word for journey (מסע) is related to the words for group (סיעה). The connection between Jews – alone we do not have the vessels to receive light. We must be together – then we receive great illumination. Especially, when joined with *tzaddikim*.

תפילה

Master of the World! Thank You for the hand that You extended to me midlife, elevating me on this amazing path that I have been walking on ever since. For without that, Father, I could have G-d forbid continued and concluded the journey of my life on an entirely false course.

Master of the World! The most beautiful moment of my life was that first moment during which I merited truly desiring You, experiencing Your presence. Even though, I did not realize then that that my search was just beginning.

Master of the World! Help me reach everything that I have not yet attained, everything that I so desperately wish to improve. For example, *davening*: Help me, Father, to understand that ultimately I do not *daven* in order to finish quickly and go on with my day. Help me comprehend that my *tefilla* is itself the objective – I should linger there as long as possible, for those are the moments during which I am closest to You. Help me, Father, to relish *davening* and not try to “get it over with.”

Another example, my interpersonal relationships: there are certain people that have a smile glued to their faces permanently and anyone who meets them is revived by their countenance. But I, Father, I am so self-absorbed still, to the point that there are people who I know wish for me to greet them, express joy upon encountering them, even wordlessly, and yet I often evade them – as if it is okay that I am immersed in my own “more important” matters. Why, Father? Why am I unable to brighten my expression towards everyone? Maybe I am afraid that they will not reciprocate – even so, is avoidance really the best solution? To evade him? Help me, Father.

Another example, my eating habits: why am I so obsessed with food? Why, after four or five hours of not putting something into my mouth, do I feel compelled to eat something even if I am not hungry? When will I be so fixated on You that I will not need anything else?

Master of the World! Help me enhance everything that requires improvement so that my life will be filled with holiness, joy, love of others. Help me, Father.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

דוֹב

Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai *Shlita* and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material - any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*. Thank you Mordi Blass for your help with some of the Hebrew expressions.

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