

פרשת בהעלותך

The story is certainly apocryphal but it is indicative of life in anti-Semitic Eastern Europe not so long ago.

The antagonistic policeman saw the Jew on the other side of the street and called out to him, 'Yid – where are you going?' 'I don't know', was the response. 'Tell me where are you going or I will arrest you.' 'I don't know.' This went on a few times until the persecuting cop hauled the uncooperative Jew off to jail.

When he was brought to the jail, the office in charge, a little friendlier than his colleague, asked why the Jew just didn't answer the question and avoid all the unnecessary trouble. 'I was telling the truth. I really didn't know where I was going. I walked out the door thinking I was going to the synagogue and I ended up in jail.'

It is true. Most of our grandparents and great-parents and their forebears had very limited control over their lives. For some, every day was precarious, not knowing what the ensuing hours would bring. Often, of course, the day was a standard day without any surprises and absent of any unusual events. For most, with the exception of the all-too-frequent pogroms and the years of war and the terrible *Shoah*, the day had a standard pattern, turning out as expected.

At the same time, though, we can begin to imagine the weight of the unknown that was surely felt on a regular basis. The exception to the standard of 'just another day' was so difficult and the general state of oppression that was felt in so many lands, cities and villages meant that apprehension, if not downright fear, was the rule. The consistency of the lurking fear of 'what might happen' meant that the lives of many were burdened with an overwhelming concern about the unknown.

What happens, however, when there is a parallel uncertainty, but the source of uncertainty is not the enemy? What happens when the source of uncertainty has unparalleled reliability and unequalled trustworthiness?

That is what we read about in our Parshas Bhaalosecha.

In many ways, Parshas Bhaalosecha is the completion of the unit that comprises the first three Parshos of Sefer B'midbar: B'midbar, Noso and our Parsha.

All three of those Parshos provided our ancestors with a most lengthy preparation for their travel from Sinai to Eretz Yisroel.

That preparation is remarkable in and of itself because of the extraordinary detail and the multiplicity of verses that were to govern a journey that was to last for only a handful of days.

We read in Sefer D'vorim (Perek 1/Posuk 2), at its very beginning, the words of exhortation that Moshe Rabbenu presented to B'nei Yisroel in the last weeks of his life:

אֶחָד עֶשֶׂר יוֹם מִחֹרֵב דְּרָךְ הַר שְׁעִיר עַד קָדֵשׁ בְּרִנֵּעַ:

It is eleven days from Chorev via Mt. Seir to arrive a Kadesh Barne'a.

Chorev is Mt. Sinai and Kadesh Barne'a was the closest entry point into Eretz Yisroel. The route that travels through Mt. Seir was the quickest path to make that journey.

Rashi writes there:

אחד עשר יום מחורב - אמר להם משה ראו מה גרמתם, אין לכם דרך קצרה מחורב לקדש ברנע כדרך הר שעיר ואף הוא מהלך אחד עשר יום, ואתם הלכתם אותו בשלשה ימים, שהרי בעשרים באייר נסעו מחורב שנאמר (במדבר י'יא¹) ויהי בשנה השנית בחדש השני בעשרים בחדש וגו' ובכ"ט בסיון שלחו את המרגלים מקדש ברנע, צא מהם שלושים יום שעשו (שם יא/ד-כב, לא-לד) בקברות התאווה, שאכלו הבשר (שם כ) חדש ימים, ושבעה ימים שעשו (שם יב/טז) בחצרות להסגר שם מרים, נמצא בשלשה ימים הלכו כל אותו הדרך, וכל כך היתה שכינה מתלבטת בשבילכם למהר ביאתכם לארץ, ובשביל שקלקלתם הסב אתכם סביבות הר שעיר ארבעים שנה:

Eleven days from Chorev – Moshe said to Israel, 'See what you caused. You had no shorter road from Chorev to Kadesh Barne'a than going through Mt. Seir. That route is eleven days long. But you walked it in three days.'

[The computation is as follows:] On the twentieth of Iyar Israel traveled from Chorev as it is written, 'It was in the second year in the second month on the twentieth of the month, etc.' On the twenty-ninth of Sivan they sent the

¹ This verse as well as the others to which Rashi refers in the next lines are all found in our Parsha. This verse reads in its entirety:

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיָּת בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בְעֶשְׂרִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ נִעְלָה הָעֶנָן מֵעַל מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדוּת:

It was in the second year in the second month on the twentieth of the month, the cloud departed from above the Tent of Testimony.

m'raglim-spies from Kadesh Barne'a. Deduct the thirty days that were spent in *Kivros HaTa'ava*, when they ate the meat for a 'month of days' and the seven days that they were in *Chatzeros* where Miriam was isolated. The result is that it took them [only] three days to make that trek.

Why did they go so fast?

Moshe continued, 'Because the Shechinah was pushing you to quickly enter Eretz Yisroel and because you ruined things, He made you circle Mt. Seir for forty years.'²

We read in our Parsha (B'midbar Perek 10/Posuk 33):

וַיִּסְעוּ מֵהַר ה' דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וְאָרוֹן בְּרִית ה' נָסַע לִפְנֵיהֶם דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לְתוֹרָ
לָהֶם מִנוּחָה:

They travelled from the Mountain of G-d, a trip of three days and the Ark of the Covenant of Hashem traveled before them on a trip of three days to search a place of rest for them.

Rashi writes:

דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים - מֵהַלֶּךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים הֵלְכוּ בְיוֹם אֶחָד שֶׁהִיא הַקְּדוּשָׁה בְרוּךְ הוּא חִפְזָ
לְהַכְנִיִּים לְאֶרֶץ מִיָּד:

A trip of three days – They went a distance of three days in one day. G-d wanted to bring them into Eretz Yisroel immediately³.

It is obvious, then, that the elaborate instructions with their great specificity that were given regarding traveling must have been most significant if they were only intended to last a brief time.

Among those instructions we read (B'midbar Perek 9/P'sukim 15-23):

וּבְיוֹם הַקָּדִים אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן כִּפְסֵה הָעֵנָן אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְאֹהֶל הָעֵדוּת וּבְעֶרְבֵי יְהוָה עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן
כִּמְרָאָה אֲשֶׁר עַד בִּקְרָא: כֵּן יְהִי תְמִיד הָעֵנָן יִכְסֶּנּוּ וּמְרָאָה אֲשֶׁר לֵילָה: וּלְפִי הָעֵלוֹת הָעֵנָן

² See Rashi's supra-commentaries that check this computation based on his sources here and others that question his conclusion.

³ Whether or not the 'three days' mentioned here refers to a distance of three days, not three days on the calendar, or the 'three days' of actual traveling to which Rashi refers in Sefer D'vorim above, requires investigation.

מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְאַחֲרָי כֵן יִסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבַמְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֵן שָׁם הָעֶנָן שָׁם יַחֲנוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: עַל פִּי ה' יִסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל פִּי ה' יַחֲנוּ כֹל יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֵן הָעֶנָן עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן יַחֲנוּ: וּבִהֲאָרִיךְ הָעֶנָן עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן יָמִים רַבִּים וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מִשְׁמֶרֶת ה' וְלֹא יִסְעוּ: וַיֵּשׂ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה הָעֶנָן יָמִים מִסְפָּר עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן עַל פִּי ה' יַחֲנוּ וְעַל פִּי ה' יִסְעוּ: וַיֵּשׂ אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה הָעֶנָן מִעֶרֶב עַד בֹּקֶר וְנִעְלָה הָעֶנָן בַּבֹּקֶר וְנִסְעוּ אוֹ יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה וְנִעְלָה הָעֶנָן וְנִסְעוּ: אוֹ יָמִים אוֹ חֲדָשׁ אוֹ יָמִים בְּהֲאָרִיךְ הָעֶנָן עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן לִשְׁכֹּן עֲלָיו יַחֲנוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא יִסְעוּ וּבִהֲעֵלְתוֹ יִסְעוּ: עַל פִּי ה' יַחֲנוּ וְעַל פִּי ה' יִסְעוּ אֶת מִשְׁמֶרֶת ה' שָׁמְרוּ עַל פִּי ה' בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה:

On the day when the Mishkan was erected, the cloud covered the Tabernacle of the Tent of Testimony and in the evening it appeared as fire upon the Mishkan until morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it and the appearance of fire nightly.

According to when the cloud would depart⁴ from upon the tent and B'nei Yisroel would travel and the place where the cloud would reside there, there would B'nei Yisroel encamp.

When the cloud was upon the Mishkan many days, B'nei Yisroel observed the watch of Hashem and they would not travel. Sometimes the cloud would be a number of days upon the Mishkan, according to the mouth of G-d they would travel and according to the mouth of G-d they would encamp. Sometimes the cloud would be from evening until morning and the cloud would depart and they traveled or a full day and a night and the cloud would depart and they traveled. Or two days or a month or the days [of a year⁵], when the cloud would be a lengthy time of the Mishkan to dwell upon it, B'nei Yisroel would encamp and they would not travel; when it departed they would travel. According to the mouth of G-d they would encamp and according to the mouth of G-d they would travel; the watch of Hashem they guarded according to the mouth of G-d in the hand of Moshe⁶.

⁴ This is Rashi's translation. Israel traveled when the cloud departed and traveled. Their signal was the departure of the cloud, not its upward movement.

⁵ Rashi.

⁶ Rashi to Posuk 18 writes:

We read in Parshas D'vorim (Perek 1/Posuk 46):

וַתֵּשְׁבוּ בְקִדְשׁ יָמִים רַבִּים כַּיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר יֵשְׁבֶתֶם:

You dwelled in Kadesh like the days that you dwelled.

Rashi explains:

ותשבו בקדש ימים רבים – תשע עשרה שנה, שנאמר כימים אשר ישבתם בשאר המסעות והם היו שלשים ושמונה שנה, תשע עשרה מהם עשו בקדש ותשע עשרה שנה הולכים ומטורפים וחזרו לקדש, כמו שנאמר (במדבר לב/יג⁷) ויניעם במדבר. כך מצאתי בסדר עולם:

You dwelled in Kadesh many days – Nineteen years as it is written 'like the days that you dwelled' in your other travels which took a total of thirty-eight years. Nineteen of those years you spent in Kadesh and the other nineteen years you went and were stressed and returned to Kadesh as it says, 'Hashem

על פי ה' יסעו - שנינו במלאכת המשכן, כיון שהיו ישראל נוסעים היה עמוד הענן מתקפל ונמשך על גבי בני יהודה כמין קורה, תקעו והריעו ותקעו ולא היה מהלך עד שמשה אומר (במדבר י/לה) קומה ה', ונסע דגל מחנה יהודה, זו בספרי:

According to the mouth of G-d they traveled – We learn in the B'raisa of *Melech HaMikshkan*: When Israel would travel, the pillar of the cloud would fold itself over and extend itself over the Tribe of Yehuda like a beam. They sounded *teki'a, teru'a* and *teki'a* and they would not begin the walk until Moshe said 'Arise Hashem'. Then the Flag of the Camp of Yehuda would travel.' This is in the Sifrei.

ועל פי ה' יחנו - כיון שהיו ישראל חונים, עמוד הענן מתמר ועולה ונמשך על גבי בני יהודה כמין סוכה, ולא היה נפרש עד שמשה אומר (שם לו) שובה ה' רבבות אלפי ישראל, הוי אומר על פי ה' וביד משה:

According to the mouth of Hashem they encamped – Once Israel would encamp, the pillar of the cloud would become upright and vertical and would spread itself over the Tribe of Yehuda like a sukka-covering. It would not spread out until Moshe said, 'Rest Hashem, the myriads and thousands of Israel. This is 'according to the mouth of Hashem in the hand of Moshe'.

⁷ The entire verse reads:

וַיַּחַר אַף ה' בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּנְעַם בַּמִּדְבָּר אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה עַד תָּם כָּל הַדּוֹר הָעֹשֶׂה הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי ה':
Hashem was angry with Israel and He moved them about in the wilderness for forty years until the entire generation that did bad in the eyes of G-d was finished.

made them move about in the wilderness. So I found in the Braisa of *Seder Olom*.

Israel had no calendar of events that foretold what was going to happen. Israel was not given a schedule that would inform them in advance as how to organize and plan. The movement of the Divine cloud, the sounding of the *Chatzotzros*-trumpets and Moshe's proclamation gave a command to uproot themselves immediately and without hesitation.

How do we envision the way that our ancestors waited around on those days and years? Did they constantly look at the cloud or, after years in Kadesh Barne'a, did they ignore their precarious position and assume that they were settled?

Did they completely unpack or did they leave from their suitcases because there was no point in packing if they were only going to be there for a night or two?

We will have the opportunity to view some sources shortly.

What we do know is that the Torah praises Israel. Israel kept Hashem's watch; they loyally followed His directions and accepted their lack of control over their personal circumstances!

The Halachah has something to say about this mindset as well. In Masseches Shabbos (31 b) we have a dispute that centers on these verses regarding Israel's travels.

Before we see that Gemara and the particular subject with which it deals, let us review what we already know.

1. The Torah forbids doing *Melachos*. A *Melachah* is a constructive act that was vital for building the Mishkan.
2. The nature of each and every *Melachah* is one of תיקון. A *tikkun* is that which brings improvement to the article upon which the *Melachah* was performed.
3. When I read the list of the thirty-nine *Melachos* (Masseches Shabbos 73 a) I note that some of them are not related to *Tikkun* whatsoever – they are destructive.
4. Destructive acts are called קלקול – ruinous activities, quite the opposite of *tikkun*.

5. Examples of 'destructive' melachos are מוחק-*mocheik*/erasing, קורע-*ko'rei'a*/tearing and סותר-*so'ser*/disassembling.
6. How could these acts be considered a *Melachah* when they are destructive?
7. Rambam writes in Hilchos Shabbos (Perek 1/Halachos 17-18):
 כל המקלקלין פטורין, כיצד הרי שחבל בחבירו או בבהמה דרך השחתה וכן אם קרע בגדים או שרפן או שבר כלים דרך השחתה הרי זה פטור כל המקלקל על מנת לתקן חייב, כיצד...שמחק כדי לכתוב במקום שמחק...חייב.

Every act of *kilkul* is only forbidden *MidRabbanah*. For example, if someone injures someone or an animal in a destructive manner or, similarly, one tears clothing or burns them or break vessels destructively – he is exempt from the Torah's punishment because he only did an act forbidden *MidRabbanan*.

If one does a ruinous act for as a means of improvement, for example one erases in order to write in the place that was erased – he has done an act forbidden by the Torah.

8. That is, there are times when a destructive act is an indispensable prerequisite for an act of improvement, of repair. If there is a tear in a garment, it is sometimes necessary to extend the tear so that the two sides can be sewn together seamlessly. Or, if one wishes to write on a surface that already has writing upon it, the earlier writing has to be erased in order for the new writing to be inscribed in its place. These are acts of 'destruction' which are necessary for the *tikkun* that is desired.
9. If we take the act of erasing as a paradigm, it is understood that if one erases piece of paper X and then writes on piece of paper Y that act of *mocheik* was unrelated to the writing and thus its prohibition would be only d'Rabbanan.
10. And thus a section of the Rambam in Halachah 18 that we omitted is now easy to understand:

הרי שסתר כדי לבנות במקומו...חייב:

If one destructs an object in order to build in *in its place*, it is a Torah prohibition.

11. Just like erasing is forbidden by the Torah only when one writes upon the erased surface so is destruction/disassembling forbidden by the Torah only

when one constructs/makes an improvement through 'building' in the place where the destruction occurred.

Now we are ready to learn the Gemara in Masseches Shabbos. We read there⁸:

...קסבר...סותר על מנת לבנות במקומו - הוי סותר, על מנת לבנות שלא במקומו - לא הוי סותר. אמר ליה...מכדי, כל מלאכות ילפינן להו ממשכן והתם סותר על מנת לבנות שלא במקומו הוא! [רש"י - שהיו סותרין אותו בחנייה זו, ונוסעים למקום אחר, וחונים, וחוזרים ומקימין אותו.]

אמר ליה: שאני התם, כיון דכתיב על פי ה' יחנו - כסותר על מנת לבנות במקומו דמי.

...He held that [only] destruction with the intent to rebuild on that spot is the Torah prohibition of *soseir*-destruction⁹. Destruction without the intent to rebuild on that spot is not the Torah's prohibition of destruction.

He said back to him, 'Let us see. We learn the Torah's prohibition of *Melachah* from that which was done to build the Mishkan. There, in the Mishkan, they destroyed without the intent to rebuild in its place! [Rashi:

⁸ The *sugya* is inter-generational, combining opinions and interpretations of *Tannaim* and *Amoraim*. For that reason, listing the names of the various Chachamim will be confusing and since for our topic it is not necessary, the names have been omitted here.

⁹ Rashi's commentary (d.h. *I'olom*) here will resonate with the reader following the introduction that we have written. He writes:

סותר על מנת לבנות במקומו - הוי סותר, כל מקלקל דשבת - הוי פטור, דלאו היינו מלאכת מחשבת, וסותר דתנן באבות מלאכות דמייחייב - סותר על מנת לבנות הוא, ואינו יכול לבנות אלא אם כן סותרו, והשתא לאו קלקול הוא.

Destructing with the intent to rebuild on the same spot is the Torah's prohibition of *soseir*. Whenever a person ruins something on Shabbos it is [only] a rabbinic prohibition because it does not meet the definition of *melachah*. When the Mishnah writes the thirty-nine Melachos that are prohibited by the Torah it is referring to destruction with the intent to rebuild on the spot. Since he cannot build on the spot without destroying, so the destruction is not considered ruination.

they would take apart the Mishkan in one encampment and travel to another place, encamp and would again rebuild the Mishkan there.]

He replied, 'The Mishkan is different [than other circumstances]. Since it says 'according to the mouth of G-d they encamped' – it is comparable to their destroying with the intent of rebuilding in its place.

We do not know why 'according to the mouth of G-d' should make the act of rebuilding as if it was 'with the intent of rebuilding in its place'.

We will give some explanations:

Rabbenu Chananel explains' the relationship between 'by the mouth of Hashem they encamped and by the mouth of Hashem they traveled' and building in its place:

ויתכן שיאמר להם שובו חנו במקום שסרתם כסותר על מנת לבנות במקומו דמי:

Since it was possible that Hashem would tell them to return back to the place from which they departed, it was as if they destroyed with the intent to build in the same place.

That is, our ancestors were aware that they had no say regarding their destination and since it was possible that Hashem would direct them to return to their immediately previous encampment, then, in fact, they would end up rebuilding in the same place where they dismantled. However, the Torah prohibition of סותר is not determined by whether or not, in fact, the rebuilding took place in whatever spot. The determining factor of the Torah prohibition of סותר is the intent (על מנת) that the disassembler had at the time of disassembly. Thus they left open the possibility that the very place in which they disassembled the Mishkan would be the location of its reassembly¹⁰.

¹⁰ In the collection of Rav Elyashiv ZT"l's comments during his daily Shiurim in *Tiferes Bachurim*, and later in the caravan that was in close proximity to his house, *He'oros*, he offers another explanation regarding the connection between *al pi Hashem* etc. and rebuilding in the place of the destruction:

דכיון דהוי על פי ה', זה גופא מחשיב עצם הסתירה לתיקון, דלא שייך לומר דמעשה זה קלקול הוא כיון דנעשה על פי ה'.

That since the disassembly was 'according to the mouth of G-d', that in and of itself accords the 'destruction' the status of *tikkun*-improvement. It is

Earlier in the Torah we have another episode of migration when the traveler was unaware of his destination. We read (B'reishis Perek 12/P'sukim 1-4):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמְמֹלֶדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה׃
וְאָעֲשֶׂה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדַּלְהָ שְׁמִי וְהָיָה בְרָכָה׃ וְאֶבְרַכְהָ מִבְּרַכְיָךָ וּמִקְלָלְךָ אֶאֱרָא
וּנְבָרְכֶנּוּ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה׃ וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי ה' וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם
בֶּן חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחֹרָן׃

Hashem said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace and from the house of your father to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you and I will aggrandize your name and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse; all the families of the earth will be blessed through you. Avram went as Hashem spoke to him and Lot went with him; Avram was seventy-five years old at his leaving from Choron.

Our Meforshim, each in his own way, see in these verses the unique willingness of Avraham Ovinu to follow the Word of Hashem.

Radak writes:

כאשר דבר אליו ה' - שלא שאל ולא נסה אלא האמין בו שיקיים לו מה שאמר לו:

As Hashem spoke with him – Avraham did not ask and did not test; rather, he believed in Him that He would fulfill what He said to him.

Or HaChaim HaKodosh writes:

וילך אברם וגו'. כל הכתוב מיותר שהרי אומר בסמוך בסדר הודעת ההליכה (פסוק ה¹¹) ויקח אברם וגו' ויצאו ללכת וגו'...אכן כוונת הכתוב הוא להודיע חיבתו של אברהם שלא נתעכב אפילו שעה אחת אלא בגמר דברי ה' לך תכף וילך אברם ולא נתעכב לשום סיבה ועזב את אביו ומולדתו.

impossible to say that this act of disassembly was ruinous since it was done 'according to the mouth of G-d'.

¹¹ The entire verse reads:

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו וְאֶת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן
וַיֵּצְאוּ לִלְכֹת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃

Avram took his wife Sarai and Lot, his brother's son, and all of their property that they acquired and the soul that they made in Choron and they went out to go to the Land of Canaan and they came to the Land of Canaan.

Avram went etc. – this entire verse is superfluous because the following verse informs us that Avraham went – ‘Avram took etc. and they went out to go etc.’ In fact, the intent of the verse is to inform us of Avraham’s love [for Hashem] – he didn’t hesitate even for a short amount of time. Rather, when Hashem finished His words: ‘Go for yourself’, ‘Avram went immediately’. He did not wait for any reason and straightaway forsook his father and his birthplace.

Chasam Sofer in *Toras Moshe* brings the explanation of his *Rebbe*, the *Ba’al Hafalah* who writes:

וילך אברהם כאשר דבר אליו ה' וילך אתו לוט ואברם בן חמש ושבעים שנה בצאתו מחרן. יתפרש כי הנה הקדוש ברוך הוא הבטיח כבר לאברהם טובו ונעמו, כנאמר והיה ברכה, והיה זה לכאורה חידוש גדול שהלך אברם בדרכי ה' ובמצותיו, כי הקדוש ברוך הוא שוב לא יחזור, אלא שאברהם הי' עובד את השם יתברך באהבה ובכל לבו, וזה שכתב כאשר דבר אליו ה'.

Avram went like Hashem spoke to him and Lot went with him and Avram was seventy-five years old when he went out of Choron – This verse will be explained as follows: Behold, Hashem already had promised Avraham all that was good and was pleasant, as it is written, ‘you will be a blessing’. And it was a *chiddush* and surprise that Avraham continued to go in the path of Hashem and His Mitzvos – because in any case Hashem would not retract his words.

But, the explanation is that Avraham was a person who served G-d with love and with all of his heart and that is what is taught in the words, ‘like Hashem spoke to him’.¹²

¹² At the end of this explanation of the *Ba’al Hafalah*, Chasam Sofer adds an additional insight of his own to this verse.

Chasam Sofer questions, as do others, why the age of Avraham Ovinu is given in this verse together with his traveling companion, Lot. He writes:

...רק לפי שהיה אברהם בן שבעים וחמש שנים ואין לו יורש וצופה על ירושה גדולה, וזה הוא הסמיכות וילך אתו לוט ואברם בן חמש ושבעים שנה וגו'.

[The Torah writes Lot’s traveling with Avraham to teach] that it was only because that Avraham [was an old man at the age of] seventy-five years and that he had no heir [closer than Lot] and Lot anticipated a large inheritance –

That is, Avraham did not leave because of the promises that Hashem made to him, otherwise he could have received the bounty of the promises without continuing on his hard and challenging journey, because Hashem does not retract His promises of goodness.

Rather, Avraham went because Hashem spoke to him and told him to go.

Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch also emphasizes the words 'כאשר דבר אליו ה' – like Hashem spoke to him and understands their impact differently, although the result of them testifying to Avraham's love of Hashem is the same as that of all of the other commentaries.

Rav Hirsch writes:

וילך אברם כאשר דבר אליו ה', ולא: "כאשר אמר אליו". "כאשר אמר" היה מתייחס לכל ההבטחות, שנתלו למצות "לך לך"; ואכן, היה בהבטחות אלה כדי לפתות את אברהם לקיים את מצות ה'. אולם, אברהם לא הלך על פי ההבטחה, אלא על פי דבר ה'; הוא הלך, מפני שה' דיבר אליו.

Avram went as Hashem spoke (di'ber) with him – It does not write here 'as Hashem said (*omar*) to him. Had it written 'like He said', that would have related to all of the promises that accompanied the command *lech lecha*¹³. In fact, those promises were sufficient to entice Avraham to fulfill the Divine

[that is why Lot went with Avraham]. This is the reason for the juxtaposition of 'Lot went with him and Avram was seventy-five years old'.

¹³ These verses that contain the Divine promises begin with the words:

ויאמר ה' אל אברם...

Hashem said to Avram.

If Avraham went because of those words, then the Torah should have written:

כאשר אמר

Like he said.

That would have been consistent to write 'Hashem said' and Avram went like 'Hashem said'.

In fact, though, the Torah writes 'Hashem said' and Avram went like 'Hashem spoke'. The change in the verb used for Divine communication indicates that Avraham's going was not related to the promises said in Hashem's 'saying'.

commandments. But, Avraham did not go because of the promise, but because Hashem *spoke* (*di'ber*). He went because Hashem spoke to him and commanded him.

We will let the words of the *Netziv* complete this survey of *meforshim* and let them connect to our Parshas B'ha'alosecha. He writes:

אף על פי שהיה קשה לו לא עכב, ופירוש כאשר תקף ומיד... ולא המתין על הכנה הדרושה לזה, וכדי שלא יהיו לו עכובים ממכירת חפציו וכדומה יצא תקף ומיד.

Even though it was difficult, Avraham did not hesitate. That is the meaning of *כאשר*-like Hashem spoke to him. He left immediately. He did not wait to make the necessary preparations for this trip or delays from selling his property, etc. He went out immediately.

Let us review what we read above regarding the movement of our ancestors in the Midbar.

על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו את משמרת ה' שמרו על פי ה' ביד משה:

According to the mouth of G-d they would encamp and according to the mouth of G-d they would travel; the watch of Hashem they guarded according to the mouth of G-d in the hand of Moshe.

The question begs to be asked. We have already read that they traveled and encamped 'על פי ה', according to the mouth of Hashem. What does this verse add to our previous knowledge?

And, as long as we are examining this verse, let us explore the meaning of the term *משמרת*, 'watch' to which the Posuk refers. This is the first time that this term is introduced. What does it mean?

We read in Midrash Aggadah to this Posuk:

על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו. לא שיאמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא ליסע ולחנות, אלא שהיו מביטין בענן שעל המשכן, וביום העלות הענן מעל המשכן, היו יודעים רצונו של מקום שיסעו, ועת שישכון הענן היו יודעים שרצונו של מקום שיחנו:

According to the mouth of Hashem they encamped and according to the mouth of Hashem they travelled – It was not that when they encamped and travelled that Hashem had to tell them each time to travel and tell them each

time to encamp. Rather, they would look at the cloud that was upon the Mishkan and on the day that it departed from above the Mishkan they knew that it was G-d's Will that they should travel and at the time that the cloud would dwell, they knew that it was G-d's Will that they should encamp.

Remarkable, isn't it? The entirety of B'nei Yisroel acted just as their Father Avraham did. Despite the hardship, despite the difficulty, despite the unknown – they were anticipating the Divine signal which they followed faithfully when it arrived¹⁴.

Alshich HaKodosh takes us a step further in our understanding of our verse:

כלל הדברים כי גדלה ורבה האמנתם, כי על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו ואין זה רק כי את משמרת ה' שמרו. והוא מאמרם ז"ל (ילקוט ירמיה רמז רסד) על פסוק זכרתי לך

¹⁴ And the very same Divine sign that Israel anticipated in the Midbar was what HaKodosh Boruch Hu used for our Father Avraham and our Mother Sarah.

We read in Parshas Vayera, regarding the *Akeida* (B'reishis Perek 22/Posuk 4):
ביום השלישי וישא אברהם את עיניו וירא את המקום מרחוק:

On the third day, Avraham lifted his eyes and he saw the place from afar.

Rashi writes:

ביום השלישי - למה איחר מלהראותו מיד, כדי שלא יאמרו הממו וערבבו פתאום וטרד דעתו, ואילו היה לו שהות להמלך אל לבו לא היה עושה:

On the third day – Why did Hashem tarry so much and not show Avraham the place immediately? Hashem did so that people would not say that Hashem stunned Avraham and confused him with the command of the *Akeida* and confused his mind – and if he had time to think about it, he would not have gone to the *Akeida*.

חסד נעורֵיך וכו' לכתך אחרי וכו' (ירמיה ב/ב¹⁵). שהיה אפשר להם לומר, איה הכנה לדרך לחולים ולמעוברות וחיות עלות עליהם ומניקות וילדים...ולא יהרהרו...כי מיד היו דבקים בקונם, נאמנים בבריתו וקיימים במאמרו. וזהו את משמרת ה', שהיה להם מאז יצאו ממצרים, שמרו בכל נסיעה.

The general idea of these words is that the level of faith of Israel in the Midbar was great and grew. They encamped according to the mouth of G-d and they travelled according to the mouth of G-d. This is the meaning of 'they guarded Hashem's watch'. And this is in consonance with the Yalkut's interpretation of the verse in Yirmiyahu 'I Hashem remember the kindness of your youth...your going after Me etc.'

It was possible for Israel to say there 'where is our preparation for the travel for the infirm and the pregnant women and those who have just given birth and the nursing mothers and the children?'

They did not have second thoughts. Immediately they cleaved to Hashem, they were faithful to His covenant and fulfilled His Will¹⁶. That is 'the watch

וירא את המקום - ראה ענן קשור על ההר:

He saw the place – He saw a cloud tied over the mountain.

Avraham Ovinu displayed unique dedication to Hashem and he was looking for the sign. He raised his eyes and saw the cloud!

We read regarding Sarah I'meinu (ibid. Perek 24/Posuk 67):

וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֵהָלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ וַיִּנָּחַם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ:
Yitzchak brought Rivka to the tent of Sarah, his mother, and he took Rivka and she became his wife and he loved her and Yitzchak was comforted after his mother.

Rashi writes:

האהלה שרה אמו - ויביאה האהלה ונעשית דוגמת שרה אמו, כלומר והרי היא שרה אמו, שכל זמן ששרה קיימת היה נר דלוק מערב שבת לערב שבת, וברכה מצויה בעיסה, וענן קשור על האהל, ומשמתה פסקו, וכשבאת רבקה חזרו:

The tent of Sarah his mother – [Understand the verse this way:] Yitzchak brought Rivka to the tent and the tent became the emblem of his mother Sarah.

of Hashem' that was part of them from when they left Egypt, they guarded it on each journey...

We can extend the Alshich's words and their impact when we read the explanation that the Brisker Rav ZT"l gave to a verse in Parshas Yisro.

The Posuk (Sh'mos Perek 18/Posuk 7) reads:

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לְקִרְיַת חֵתָנוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ וַיִּשָּׂק לּוֹ וַיִּשְׁאַלְוּ אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ הָאֱהָלָה:

Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law and he bowed to him and he kissed him and each man asked the other regarding their well-being; and they came to the tent.

The Brisker Rav ZT"l quotes his grandfather, the *Beis HaLevi* ('Rav Yosef Dov') and explains the strictures that existed in Israel in all of their encampments.

במדרש רבה (שמות יז/ט¹⁷) רבי אליעזר אומר הקדוש ברוך הוא אמר לו צא, וביאר הגאון רב יוסף דוב זצ"ל הא דהיה צריך משה לציווי מיוחד קדוש ברוך הוא ובלעדי

This means to say, the tent was Sarah his mother. As long as Sarah lived, her candles burned from one Friday to the next and the bread dough was blessed. There was a cloud tied over her tent. When Sarah died, all of that stopped. When Rivka came, all of the signs returned.

Yitzchak sought the holiness of his mother's home – a home upon which the Divine cloud rested. The cloud was there for Sarah I'meinu and returned for our Mother Rivka.

¹⁵ The entire verse reads:

הֲלֹךְ וְקִרְאתָ בְּאָזְנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כִּי אָמַר ה' זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ אֲהַבְתָּ כָּלִילְתִּיךְ לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי
בְּמִדְבָר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זָרְעָה:

[Hashem said to the Novi Yirmiyahu], 'Go and proclaim in the ears of Yerushalayim saying, "Thus says Hashem, 'I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your marriage [with Me]; your going after Me in the wilderness, in an unsown land.'"

הציווי לא היה יכול לצאת, הטעם הוא כי סדר מסעם ואופן חנייתם היה מכוון על פי הוראה משמים כדכתיב "על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו" ונאסרה עליהם היציאה חוץ לענן בלא ציווי משמים, דהיציאה הלא היא כנסיעה, ולכך מצינו בסוף פרשת בשלח (יז/ט) שאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא "וצא הלחם בעמלק", ופירש רש"י שם מהמכילתא צא מן הענן והלחם בו, דהיינו שמלבד הציווי על עצם המלחמה הוצרך לציווי מיוחד כדי להתיר יציאתו מן הענן, כך גם כאן הורה לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לצאת לקראת חותנו, כי בלא ציווי זה היה נמנע ממנו לצאת מהענן...

In Midrash Rabba we read: Rabi Eliezer says, "Hashem told Moshe to go out". The Beis HaLevi explains that Moshe had to have a unique commandment from G-d and without it he could not leave the camp. The reason is that the order of their travels and of their encampments was directed by Divine Instruction as it is written, 'by the mouth of G-d they travelled and by the mouth of G-d they encamped'. They were forbidden to go outside of the cloud without a Divine command – exiting the cloud was equivalent to traveling. And so we find at the end of Parshas B'shalach that Hashem said 'go and fight Amalek'. Rashi writes there, 'go out from the cloud and fight him'. That is, that in addition to the command about the war itself, a special command was required to allow going outside the cloud.

¹⁶ With these words, Alshich HaKodosh is paraphrasing the *bracha* that is made upon seeing a rainbow.

Shulchan Aruch writes in Siman 229/s'if 1:

הרואה הקשת אומר: ברוך אתה ה' א...לקינו מלך העולם זוכר הברית נאמן בבריתו וקיים במאמרו:

One who sees a rainbow recites: Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the Universe Who remembers the covenant, is trustworthy in His covenant and Who fulfils His Word.

By applying the praises of this blessing which refer to HaKodosh Boruch to Israel, Alshich presents Israel with a remarkable compliment!

¹⁷ The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר לָנוּ אַנְשִׁים וְצֵא הַלַּחֵם בְּעַמְלֵק מִחַר אֲנֹכִי נִצֵּב עַל רֹאשׁ הַגְּבֵעָה וּמִטָּה הָאֵל...לְקִים בְּיָדִי:

Moshe said to Yehoshua, 'Choose for yourself men and go out and fight against Amalek tomorrow; I will stand erect at the top of the hill and the staff of Hashem will be in my hand

Presumably, Beis HaLevi understood that Moshe would not have issued these two commands if Hashem had not instructed him to do so.

In the same way, here, Hashem instructed Moshe to go out to meet his father-in-law. Without the command, Moshe was prevented from exiting the cloud.

We now have a better understanding of *'mishmeres Hashem'*. Israel had to be on guard against leaving the Divine-Covered-Encampment just like they had to be ready to travel when the time came.

And this explanation of the Beis HaLevi is found earlier in *Be'er Mayim Chaim* to our Posuk. He writes there:

על פי ה' וגו'. ועל פי ה' יסעו את משמרת ה' שמרו וגו'. כלומר כי הן בחניה והן
בנסיעה שמרו משמרת ה' כי בחניה שמרו והמתינו כל ימי הענן. ובנסיעה לא נסעו
מעצמן כי שמרו עד עת בוא דברו אל משה מבין שני הכרובים לצוות להם על
הנסיעה... ושמרו לזה שיאמר תחילה למשה ואחר כך יעשו אף שהבינו מעצמם כי כן
צריך לעשות ככל הנאמר.

According to the mouth of G-d...and according to the mouth of G-d they traveled, the watch of Hashem they guarded –This means to say that both in the encampment and in the travel they guarded Hashem's watch. When they were encamped they waited there all the days that the cloud remained. In the traveling, they did not travel on their own initiative because they guarded and watched the time until the Word of Hashem came to Moshe from between the two *Keruvim* to command them regarding the travel.

They guarded and waited in order that they would not travel until first Hashem would speak to Moshe and afterwards they would do as they were told, even though they understood on their own that they were traveling [because they saw the departing cloud] –because that is what they had to do according to all that was said.

The fealty of our ancestors to the Ribbono Shel Olom is legend. They treated their sojourn in the wilderness like any other Divine Mitzvah. They studiously avoided violations of the boundaries that were set for them. That was the *משמרת*, the watch and guard that they erected. Of course, this is in consonance with what we learned in Masseches Eiruvim (96 a):

כל מקום שנאמר השמר פן ואל - אינו אלא בלא תעשה

Wherever the Torah says expressions of *hi'shomer-guard*, *pen-lest*, or *al-don't* – are always referring to a prohibition.

And when the opportunity arose, sometimes frequently and other times completely infrequently – they sought to travel in fulfillment of G-d's *Mitzvas Aseh* that presented itself to them at that moment.

That is, they constantly saw themselves within the sphere of G-d's Presence. The impact of the Shechinah upon their lives was palpable.

And with this we can suggest another approach in explanation of the Gemara in Masseches Shabbos that tells us that since they traveled 'על פי ה', according to the mouth of G-d, it was as if they reconstructed the Mishkan in the same place where they disassembled it.

We learn in Midrash B'reishis Rabba to Parshas Vayetze (Parshata 68/9):

...רב הונא בשם רבי אמי אמר מפני מה מכנין שמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא וקוראין אותו מקום שהוא מקומו של עולם ואין עולמו מקומו...

Rav Huna said in the name of Rabi Ami: What is the reason that we refer to Hashem as 'Mokom' – The Place¹⁸? It is because He is the place of the world; the world is not His place [because it does not contain Him].

With their dedication to HaKodosh Boruch, with their loyalty to His commandments and with their desire to fulfill His Will, our ancestors in the Wilderness were always within Hashem's place. Not only is He referred to as Mokom, in reality they saw Him Yisborach as such. B'nei Yisroel in the wilderness always knew that they were residing within His Presence.

Being so, whenever they took down the Mishkan, it was in His Place and when they re-erected it, wherever they were, it was still in His Place. In the *midbar*, the Mishkan was always reconstructed in the same place in which it was taken apart because it was always within the realm of the Shechinah. They took the Mishkan

¹⁸ Using more sophisticated vocabulary, Hashem is referred to as the Omnipresent – the One Who is everywhere.

apart with the intent, על מנת, to reconstruct it again within the realm of the Shechinah¹⁹.

The Sefarim HaKedoshim discuss what we are to learn from the lengthy descriptions of the form of our ancestors' travels in the wilderness.

One of those lessons is presented to us here with utmost clarity.

If we guard ourselves against wrong and find ourselves enthusiastically pursuing that which is good, we will truly be in the presence of HaKodosh Boruch Hu and the Divine Cloud that blessed the Ovos and I'mahos in their lives and presided over our ancestors in the Midbar. If our actions and intentions are parallel to theirs, that very same Divine Cloud will provide us with protection from and guidance for the vicissitudes of the powerful dynamics of the lives that we lead.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock

¹⁹ One may ask, then, that there should never be an issue of *מנת לבנות במקומו*, destroying with the intent to rebuild in its place, because we are always within the realm of Hashem – and therefore everything is always in one place.

The reason why this question is not valid is that it was the *intent*, על מנת, of Israel at the time of disassembly that was important.

Of course Israel was within the realm of the Shechinah. However, had they not had that sense, then their intent would not have been rebuilding in the same place because they would have been unaware or insensitive to their situation.

It is for that reason that the Torah writes 'על פי ה', according to the mouth of G-d. The constant repetition of this phrase comes to raise awareness and sensitivity so that at the moment of disassembly they would truly feel that they were then in the realm of the Shechinah and so they would be again when they reassembled the Shechinah.

