



Likkutei Sichos

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Always Traveling

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1.

JOURNEYS VERSUS ENCAMPMENTS

Regarding the verse,¹ “These are the journeys, מסעי, of the Children of Israel,” which then introduces all the places {to where they journeyed}, a question is raised:²

Since Scripture recounts the **places** where the Jewish people **camped** throughout their lengthy journey, the intent is not to recount the sections of **journey** between the encampments, but to focus on the places where they **stopped** from traveling.

If so, it should not have said, “These are the **journeys**, מסעי, of the Children of Israel,” but, “These are the **encampments**, חנייות, of the Children of Israel.” These are the places where the Jews stopped and rested!

Furthermore, during the 40 years that the Jews were in the desert, most of the time, and the most significant periods, the Jews were (not traveling from place to place, but) resting in their encampments. Therefore, when chronicling the Jewish people’s stay in the desert, Scripture should have emphasized the **encampments**.

Seemingly, this can be resolved by a **previous** comment of Rashi. At the end of *parshas Pekudei*, on the clause,³ “throughout their journeys,” Rashi comments: “The place where they camped is also called journeying. Likewise... **these are the journeys**... since they resumed their journeys from where they camped, they are all called ‘journeys.’” This means that the term “journeys,” מסעי, includes both phases, “they journeyed” and “they camped.”

However, this explanation itself requires clarification: If “the place where they camped” is called “a journey... since they resumed their journeys from

¹ {Bamidbar 33:1.}

² Alshich on Bamidbar 33:1; see also *Kli Yakar* and *Or HaChaim*.

³ {Shemos 40:38.}

where they camped,” it should be reversed. “They camped” is the conclusion and completion of the prior phase, “they journeyed” (as the aim of the journey is to reach the “where they camped”). “They journeyed” should be included in “they camped” and not the reverse!

Additionally, even if “journeying” includes the encampments between journeys, it doesn’t fit in smoothly in our context. Given that the primary emphasis lies on the **encampments**, as mentioned earlier, the term “journey” should not have been employed, as it implies that the **focus** was that “they journeyed.” (It’s just that “the place where they camped can **also** be called journeying.”)

2.

THE MAIN POINT WAS THE JOURNEY TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL

We could answer:

The purpose of “they journeyed... they camped...” was to enter the land of Israel. The primary aim was not simply to camp, but through each further leg of the journey, to make progress towards reaching Israel.

For this reason, the encampments were also referred to as “journeying,” because the encampments were not an end in themselves,⁴ but stops and interludes that enabled them to journey **further** — “**they resumed their journeys** from where they camped” — toward the land of Israel.⁵

However, this is not smooth: When it says, “these are the journeys” in the plural, it is understood that the verse is referring to —

⁴ Although they did have permanence (*Eruvin* 55b; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, pp. 235 ff.).

⁵ Similar to a temporary encampment, for example, “He continued journeying” (*Bereishis* 13:3), which Rashi quotes in *Pekudei* {Rashi on *Shemos* 40:38}, which is referred to as “journey” because it is not a (complete and final) encampment, since the journeying continues shortly after.

[not the collective theme of all their journeys, that they are (part and parcel of) **one** “journey” from Egypt to Israel, but] —

the distinct significance of each individual journey — the aspects that **differentiate** one journey from another. As Rashi comments,⁶ “Here we slept; here we felt cold...” (they were *journeys*, in plural). Since the variations between their journeys resulted from where they camped, as the traveling was identical for them all), why does Scripture say, “these are the **journeys**” and not, “these are the encampments”?

3.

LIFE’S JOURNEYS

A familiar teaching of the Baal Shem Tov,⁷ based on the verse, “These are the journeys of the Children of Israel,” is that 42 journeys correspond to {stages in} the life of every Jew:⁸ The first journey, “who left the land of Egypt,” alludes to a person’s birth; then, throughout his life, {he experiences} the other journeys, until he reaches the supreme life in the supernal land.

The Baal Shem Tov explains that Kivros HaTaavah⁹ {lit., “the graves of the craving”} is associated with the aspect of *chochmah*,¹⁰ because “over there, they buried those with cravings.” Meaning, physical desires cease to exist for those who attain the attribute of *chochmah* out of their intense embrace of Hashem. It is explained¹¹ that all the journeys were “holy and pure,” and even those during which Jews acted against the will of Hashem, the journeys themselves were “holy and very exalted.” For instance, at Kivros HaTaavah, where “all their cravings **disappeared**¹² because of their attachment to Hashem,” they had no **actual**

⁶ His second interpretation of this verse.

⁷ Quoted in *Degel Machne Ephraim*, at the beg. of our *parshah*.

⁸ In *Or HaTorah* on our *parshah* (end of p. 1352) it says, “There are also 42 journeys **every day**.”

⁹ {It was there that the Israelites died by plague as they consumed quail, which Hashem had rained down upon them in answer to their excessive complaints.}

¹⁰ {Lit., “wisdom,” the highest of the *sefiros* in *Atzilus*, and correspondingly, the highest of the soul’s faculties.}

¹¹ *Degel Machne Ephraim*, beg. of our *parshah*.

¹² See *Or HaTorah*, “*Chayei Sarah*,” s.v., “*va’yiten li*” (114b); also see *Chasam Sofer* (printed in his work, “*Shir Maon*”) on our *parshah*, on the verse, “They journeyed from Kivros HaTaavah,”

craving, moreover, “**they buried...** those with cravings” — even the possibility of a craving ceased to exist.

On this basis, the previous question becomes stronger: Why does Scripture say, “These are the **journeys?**” The focus certainly should have been placed on the **encampments**, which symbolize the different levels in service of Hashem, one higher than the other, to which a Jew needs to reach (going from strength to strength) throughout his life.

4.

ALWAYS HIGHER

The explanation is as follows:

Ideally, a person’s life should be in a state of consistent “journeying” — a person should be **marching** ahead. In the teachings of Chassidus,¹³ there is a distinction between “standing” and “marching” in relation to serving Hashem:

“Standing” implies remaining in the same place, even if one reaches a higher level. The progress made is relative, as the higher level is comparable to (and, therefore, is connected with and resembles) his previous level. So, in essence, the individual never (truly) “left” his previous level.

Truly “marching” signifies an incomparable progression and elevation where a person **completely** leaves his lower level. The higher level is incomparably higher than the previous one.

To point out several examples: Among students, there are many levels, each one higher than (but still relative to) the next. When a person becomes an (ordained) rabbi or a rabbinical judge, however, he becomes incomparable to his peers, and {even in the rabbinate} there are also multiple levels of distinction.

¹³ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shelach*,” 38d; *Maamar Tzenah Ur’enah* 5660; *Sefer HaMamaarim* 5671, p. 69 ff; et al.

Similarly, there are ten levels of holiness,¹⁴ each one higher (but relative) to the previous one, and when one rises to Gan Eden, he becomes incomparable to others {who remain at lower levels}. Even within Gan Eden, there also exist “many many¹⁵ levels and rungs of Gan Eden, one higher than the other, until the highest of levels.”

Therefore, Scripture states, “These are the **journeys**,” to hint at and emphasize that a Jew, when rising from level to level, should not remain steadfast (encamped) in the same **type** of ascent. Rather, every elevation should be such that each (“journey”) is distinct and immeasurably higher than the previous one — progressing from strength to strength.

5.

FIRST LEAVE

A deeper dimension of this idea:

Progressing from strength to strength — a quantum elevation — involves two steps: **leaving** a previous level, and **reaching** a higher one.

This distinction is reflected in the terms “marching” and “journeying”: *Marching* (primarily) emphasizes **going** forward (reaching higher), whereas *journeying* emphasizes (not only the act of moving further, but) also the **departure** from a place — “They journeyed from....” {This is evident in phrases such:} “Let us journey and let us go”;¹⁶ “they have journeyed on from this place... ‘let us go to Dosan’”;¹⁷ and, “Moshe caused Israel to journey from Yam Suf.”¹⁸

¹⁴ *Mishnah Keilim*, ch. 1, mishnah 6 ff.

¹⁵ *Tanya*, “*Iggeres Hakodesh*,” sec. 17.

¹⁶ *Bereishis* 33:12; Rashi, loc. cit., “Let us journey from here and we will go.”

¹⁷ *Bereishis* 37:17; see Rashi, loc. cit.: “They departed from brotherhood.” According to this, it expresses “uprooted,” as we will explain.

¹⁸ *Shemos* 15:22; Rashi there: “He caused them to journey against their will.”

Therefore, we find in several verses¹⁹ that the term “journey” is used in the sense of “uprooting” {leaving}. Similarly, the *Jerusalem Talmud* (in place of the expression “diverted his attention”) uses the expression “his attention **journeyed**.”²⁰ Diverting one’s attention means that the thoughts and focus of a person are “uprooted” from the previous subject.

[As we find regarding the law²¹ of tefillin:

The diversion of attention [which is forbidden] is levity or frivolity... If, however, one is steadfast in his reverence [for G-d] and engages in his own concerns, even if he is involved in his work... and his attention is not focused directly on the tefillin, he is not considered having diverted his attention.

As long as he is “steadfast in his reverence” (although “his attention is not focused directly on the tefillin”), he has not **severed** himself from the functional role of tefillin²² (which are donned to subjugate one’s mind and heart).²³ Only if a person engages “in levity or frivolity,” which **conflicts** with the purpose of tefillin, is he considered having **severed** himself from what tefillin represents²⁴ and to have **diverted** his attention.]

As mentioned earlier, the *Jerusalem Talmud* refers to this as the “his attention **journeyed**,” since that is the conceptual definition of journeying — to leave and **sever** oneself from a place.

¹⁹ See *Shoftim* (16:14): “He removed the peg” (*Meztudas David* there says, “he uprooted”; *Melachim I*, 5:31, and Rashi, loc. cit.; et al.

²⁰ See *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, “*Hesach Hadaas*,” beg., **and the sources cited there**.

²¹ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 28, par. 1 and 44, based on *Tur* and *Magen Avraham*, sec. 28, subpar. 2; Alter Rebbe’s *Siddur*, “*Hilchos Tefillin*”; see *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, “*Hanachas Tefillin*,” par. 7, **and the sources cited there**.

²² Regarding all this, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 14, p. 152 ff.

²³ *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 25, par. 5 (in the Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, sec. 25, par. 11); Alter Rebbe’s *Siddur*, *ibid*.

²⁴ For all this, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 14, p. 152 ff.

6.

MANY EXODUSES?

This is also the explanation behind the verse, “These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who went out of the land of Egypt.” Use of the plural form, “journeys,” raises a question for the Alter Rebbe:²⁵ If the Jews already had left Egypt during the **first** journey, from Ramses to Sukkos, why is the plural form used, “journeys,” to describe them when they left Egypt? He answers that “Mitzrayim,” Egypt, is etymologically related to the word *meitzar*, meaning borders and limitations. Until the Jews reached (the level represented by) Yarden Yericho, they were still considered as being restricted by the confines and limitations of “Egypt.” Consequently, they had not yet severed all their associations with Egypt. Yet, with every subsequent journey, there was an “exodus from Egypt,” signifying their exodus from the borders and limitations imposed by their previous encampment.

This is the meaning of the verse, “These are the **journeys** of the Children of Israel who went out of the land of Egypt”:

The “encampments,” representing the levels **reached** in their service of Hashem, did not mark the culmination of the Egyptian exodus. It is necessary to **depart** from the borders and limitations imposed by every encampment, and not remain even within the border and limits of a holy encampment. One **mustn’t halt** at any level, as the purpose of the encampments was (primarily) to resume “their journeys”²⁶ — “the **journeys** of the Children of Israel who **went out** from the land of Egypt.”

²⁵ *Likkutei Torah*, “Masei,” s.v., “eileh masei” (88c).

²⁶ {Rashi on *Shemos* 40:38.}

Another facet {regarding the journeys}:

As known,²⁷ the forty-two journeys through the desert symbolize our exile, when Jews find themselves in “the desert of nations.”²⁸ From the fact that the Jews are **confined** in the “desert of nations,” it emerges that the “encampments” in the desert included an element of descent and exile.

Certainly, the encampments in the “places where **they angered Me**”²⁹ represent a descent. **These** encampments, nonetheless, are still referred to as “journeys,” implying ascension.

The explanation is as follows:³⁰ The ultimate purpose of descending into exile is for the subsequent redemption (every slide prepares for as a subsequent climb). Only by descending can a person achieve an ascent, surpassing his level prior to the descent, just as light shines brighter when emerging from darkness. Accordingly, it is understood that the descent into exile is an integral part of the overall ascent towards reaching “Yarden Yericho {יריחו}” — the level of *rayach* {ריח, smell}, which symbolizes the revelation of Moshiach, who will “judge through smell”³¹ (also confirming his identity).

Even when a Jew, G-d forbid, succumbs to something contrary to Hashem’s will, he should not despair. Rather, he should strive to extract greater light from the darkness (from his misstep). He should exemplify the dynamic of “journeying” upwards, which is the superior quality of repentance. Therefore, the Torah already refers to the shortcoming as “journeying,”³² because inwardly, although concealed, it marks (the beginning of) an ascent.

²⁷ See *Likkutei Torah*, “Masei,” s.v., “eileh masei,” and its elucidation.

²⁸ *Yechezkel* 20:35.

²⁹ The wording of *Tanchuma*, “Masei,” sec. 3.

³⁰ For all this, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, p. 237 ff. (and fn. 14 there); *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 18, p. 393 ff.

³¹ *Sanhedrin* 93b.

³² As explained previously (*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 65 ff.) concerning *parshas Lech Lecha* (and Scripture’s statement (*Bereishis*. 13:1), “Avraham **ascended**...”).

8.

NEVER LOSE HOPE

On this basis, it is understood that the connection between *parshas Masei* and the time this *parshah* is publicly read³³ — *Bein HaMetzarim*,³⁴ close to Rosh Chodesh Av³⁵ — serves to encourage Jewish people:

As we enter the days of *Bein HaMetzarim*, particularly the Nine Days (which begin Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av), reminding us of the great descent of this last exile, the bitterness of exile should not make a Jew lose hope. Rather, he should recognize that all this is intended for him to transfigure and transform (*ishapcha*³⁶ — will cause that “I {Hashem} will transform”)³⁷ into “journeys” and elevations.

Therefore, especially during these days, a person should strive to increase vitality, passion, and luminance, with more enthusiasm and more light (“there is no light³⁸ except Torah”).³⁹

This will bring light to the *Bein Hametzarim*, and will reveal the ascending journeys (embedded within it) until the main journey, when these days will be transformed “to joy, gladness and happy festivals”⁴⁰ speedily in our days, literally.

— Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Matos Masei*, 5713 (1953) and 5721 (1961)

³³ For further explanations, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 18, p. 378; p. 411 ff.

³⁴ {The days between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av.}

³⁵ Or on Rosh Chodesh itself. Note our *parshah* (*Bamidbar* 33:38), which states (the date of Aharon’s passing) explicitly: “**On the first day of the fifth month**” (although the narrative of Aharon’s death is related in *parshas Chukas*, *Bamidbar* 20:28); see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 8, p. 198 ff.

³⁶ {*Ishapcha*: (lit. “transformation”) the Divine service of transforming the profane into the holy.}

³⁷ “Their mourning to joy” (*Yirmiya* 31:12; See (Tzemach Tzedek) *Or HaTorah*, “*Eicha*,” p. 1056; *Or HaTorah*, “*Masei*,” end of p. 1384 ff.; et al.).

³⁸ As it says (*Mishlei* 6:23): “For a mitzvah is a lamp and Torah is light” (*Taanis* 7b).

³⁹ And particularly by studying the laws of the *Beis HaMikdash*, through which “it is considered as if they are involved with the construction of the *Beis HaMikdash*” (*Tanchuma*, “*Tzav*,” sec. 14). Moreover, through this study, “the building of My house” is not “idle” (*Tanchuma*, *ibid.*; this is explained extensively in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 18, p. 411 ff).

⁴⁰ *Zechariah* 8:19; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Taaniyos*,” at the end; for a lengthy explanation, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 413 ff.