



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 18 | Masei | Sichah 1

Journeys — Past and Present

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1.

THE SICK PRINCE

Our *parshah* recounts the {forty-two} encampments which the Jews made while travelling through the desert. The *Midrash*¹ (which Rashi quotes in his Torah commentary)² tells a parable of a king whose son became ill, so he took him to a different place to have him healed. On their way back, his father began recounting all the legs of their journeys. He said, “Here we slept; here we cooled off; here you had a headache.” Similarly, Hashem said (to Moshe), “Recount for them {the Jews} all the places where they angered Me.” This explains why the verse says, “These are the travels of the Children of Israel.”

We need to clarify:

- a) Torah parables are absolutely precise; therefore, we must say that (not only does the above parable of the ill son who needed healing fit accurately with the analog, but also that) the specific details mentioned in the analogy (“here we slept; here we cooled off; here you had a headache”) fit well —

{The question is} where do we find these three ideas in the analogue of the encampments of the Jewish people?

- b) Furthermore: Since the *Midrash* only lists three examples and doesn't even add the adverb, “etcetera,” these examples must not only describe a part of the journey, but rather they must **encapsulate** all forty-two stages of the entire journey.
- c) It makes sense that the examples “here you had a headache” and even “here we cooled off” are a fitting analogy for the places where “**they angered Me,**” since these are experiences of pain and illness, but how does “here **we slept**” allude to **angering** the king?

¹ *Tanchuma*, “*Masei*,” sec. 3; *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 23, par. 3.

² *Rashi's* commentary on *Bamidbar* 33:1, 2nd explanation.

- d) The first two experiences are written in plural — “we slept” and “we cooled off” — which applies to {both the prince and} the king, but the third example, “you had a headache” is written in singular, which applies to the prince alone. How does that fit with the analog?

2.

WHY THREE JOURNEYS?

We could explain that the *Midrash* mentions these three examples [we slept, we cooled off, and you had a headache] simply because they reflect the Jews’ **first** three encampments in their journey from Egypt to the Sea of Reeds: (a) From Raamses to Sukkos; (b) from Sukkos to Eisam; and (c) from Eisam to Pi HaChiros:

On the verse, “They travelled from Sukkos,”³ **Rashi** remarks that this took place “on the second day {after leaving Egypt}, because on the first day they travelled from Raamses to Sukkos.” So it turns out that following the first journey from Raamses {which is in Egypt}, the Jews spent the **night** in Sukkos, and naturally, “here **we slept.**”

According to *pshat*, the second journey, when “they travelled from Sukkos and camped in Eisam,” was unique in that the Clouds of Glory appeared. As the verse continues,⁴ “Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way...”

Our Sages explain that the Clouds of Glory (in line with their function to “lead them on the way”) surrounded the Jewish people like a *sukkah* “to protect them from being smitten by the heat and the sun.”⁵ (This {protective} quality of the Clouds of Glory began when “they travelled from **Sukkos....**”)

³ *Shemos* 13:20.

⁴ *Shemos* 13:21.

⁵ Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” ch. 625 (end).

And this is what the example, “here **we cooled off**” hints at — the “shade” provided by the Clouds of Glory.

What happened during the third encampment at “Pi HaChiros”? The verse⁶ says that the Jews complained, “It would have been better for us to serve in Egypt than to **die** in the desert.” This was a **rational** complaint against Moshe — {hinted by} “**You had a headache.**”

3.

LIFE IS A JOURNEY

As known,⁷ the forty-two journeys through the desert symbolize the way in which we are to refine the “wilderness of the nations”⁸ in exile, which will end when we come to “Yarden Yericho” {which is in Israel proper}. “Yericho” יריחו is etymologically related to *reiach* ריח, meaning “smell,” which hints to the revelation of *Moshaich*, who will “judge with his sense of smell.” Then the evil of the “wilderness of the nations” will be **completely** nullified, “and I will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth.”⁹

The verse says,¹⁰ “Like the days when you left Egypt, so I will show you wonders.” Chassidus explains that the power of the future redemption comes from “your exodus from Egypt.” During the exodus from Egypt, the evil there was also eradicated; this in fact was an impetus for the future time when “I will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth.”

We find this idea clearly expressed at the Splitting of the Reed Sea, where it says that “the Israelites saw the Egyptians **dead** on the seashore.”¹¹

⁶ *Shemos* 14:12.

⁷ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Chukas, Derushei Eileh Massei.*”

⁸ *Yechezkel* 20:35; see also *Bachya, Ohr HaChaim*, and other commentators on the beg. of *parshas Masei*; *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of *parshas Naso*. {On a simple level, “the wilderness of the nations (or peoples)” means a remote region devoid of the presence of people.}

⁹ *Zechariah* 13:2; additionally, “He will eliminate death forever” (*Yeshayahu* 25:8); see also *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5628, p. 40 ff.

¹⁰ *Michah* 7:15.

¹¹ *Shemos* 14:30.

The Jews saw openly that all opposition {to G-dliness}¹² was **nullified** and **eradicated**.

We could say that in general, this is the reason why the *Midrash* {only} hints to the (first three) journeys prior to the Splitting of the Sea. For during their journeys {from Egypt} prior to the Splitting of the Sea, the Jews accomplished something akin to the the nullification and eradication of impurity achieved by means of the forty-two journeys through the wilderness to reach “Yarden Yericho” — and also accomplished later by the Jews, during all of their exiles {in the future}.¹³

It is also understood why in the Song of the Sea we say that the dread and awe engendered by the Splitting of the Sea reached “until this people You have acquired passes through.”¹⁴ Rashi quotes *Targum Onkelus* who interprets this as referring to the crossing of the Jordan River {into Israel}. And already at the introduction to **the entire Song**, it says, “Then Moshe and the children of Israel **will sing**” — in future tense — (also) referring to the song that will be sung at the Resurrection of the Dead, as Rashi explains in his Torah commentary.

4.

WHY THESE THREE?

This explanation {that the journey of the Jews in the desert mirrors our journey through life, seemingly} only applies to the narrative of the Splitting of the Sea, which took place **after** the three above-mentioned journeys. The death of the Egyptians at the Splitting of the Sea is comparable to the time when the journeys {of the Jewish people} through the “wilderness of the nations” are **complete**.

¹² {In the Hebrew original, “*le’umas zeh*”; an oblique reference to the forces of evil and impurity.}

¹³ {In other words, during those three journeys, the Jewish people accomplished something comparable to what they would accomplish throughout the entire time of *galus*.}

¹⁴ *Shemos* 15:16.

However, since the *Midrash* specifies all three journeys — and not the Splitting of the Sea — we must say that in **these journeys themselves (before** the Splitting of the Sea) are details and ideas which apply to all travels of the children of Israel,” which is why they are mentioned. Furthermore, these ideas are expressed in the three examples: “here we slept”; “here we cooled off”; and “here you had a headache.”

To understand this, we first have to analyze some details of the parable further:

- a) Since the *Midrash* uses this parable to explain the clause, “These are the travels of the children of Israel,” and also concludes by remarking, “this explains why Scripture says, ‘these are the travels of the children of Israel,’” this proves that with the parable, the *Midrash* is anticipating the question and explaining (in the words of Rashi),¹⁵ “Why were these journeys recorded?”

We need to clarify: Among the forty two journeys, there are **many** “places” for which the explanation, “recount for them... where they **angered** Me,” is not possibly relevant!

- b) In the parable, the king recounted all of their journeys “on their return journey.” Furthermore, the expression, “he said, **here**” implies that he recounted “all of their journeys” {i.e., each encampment} on their return journey, when they reached the actual encampment: Returning to the **same** place, the king said “**here** we slept, **here**...” We need to clarify: How does “on their return journey” fit with the analogue? The Jews **did not return** to any of their previous encampments; in fact, they only moved forward, closer to the land of Israel!

¹⁵ {Rashi’s commentary on *Bamidbar* 33:1.}

5.

THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

This explanation is as follows:

The “journeys” that the Jews have to go through in the “wilderness of the nations” echo the journey of the soul (and of Jews, in general) from the highest of the high {heaven} to a place of concealment {earth}. Although the purpose of this descent is [not only for the benefit it brings to the “wilderness of the nations” (**its** refinement, accomplished by the *avodah* of the Jews), but also] to elevate a Jew to a higher place through this descent. True, while travelling a Jew feels the **exile** and **concealment** {of the Divine Presence}, but **through** these journeys, he (**later**) reaches a higher place.

True, we know that the entire purpose of exile is only in order to effect an elevation. Nonetheless, since we experience a descent while in exile (it’s only that this descent leads to **something else** — to an elevation), it turns out that whilst **proceeding** on these “journeys,” we are found in a place (and state) of “desert,” where “no man lives”¹⁶ — {a place where} “they angered Me.” As the Previous Rebbe expressed in a *maamar*,¹⁷ “the substance of the concealment,¹⁸ and the concealment, in and of itself, is **contradictory** to the (Supernal) Will.

6.

DESCENT FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASCENT

When does the above apply? While we are still on the “journey.” When, however, we experience the ascent,¹⁹ then the real reason for the exile will become **revealed**. The truth is that the descent {implicit in this “journey”} does not oppose the eventual ascent, but rather, is a part of it.

¹⁶ *Yirmiyahu* 2:6.

¹⁷ {A Chassidic discourse.}

¹⁸ {In the Hebrew original, “*tzimtzum*”; the contraction and withdrawal of Divine light to enable creation.}

¹⁹ {An allusion to the Mashiach times.}

This, then, is the reason why the parable says, “on their return journey, his father began recounting all of their journeys.” Following the descent from above to below implicit in (each encampment, and in each of) the forty-two journeys, they began their **return** — an ascent from below to above. “They return” to the same encampments, implying that they then realized how even the journeys on which they (and every person individually) experienced a descent were in fact a part of an ascent.

This is the meaning of, “recount for them all the places where they angered Me” — similar to what it says (that in the Future Era, we will say):²⁰ “**Thank you, Hashem, because** You were angry with me.” We will thank Hashem for being angry with us because then we will realize how the “anger” was really an act of kindness.

How is it possible to say that the “travelling” in “the wilderness of the nations” was an act of kindness and a {spiritual} ascent? {To answer this,} the *Midrash* gives the parable of a prince who doesn’t travel alone; rather, the king “travels” alongside him. In fact, the **king “leads”** him. Furthermore, the entire purpose of the journey (and its particulars) is “**to heal him.**” With this in mind, clearly the **descent itself** is (from a deeper perspective) an expression of kindness.

7.

TRANSFORMING DARKNESS

Seemingly, we could ask: It makes sense that the descent into “the wilderness of the nations” was ultimately a kindness that caused an ascent because it was the King who initially led them there. But when the Jewish people **sinned** and “angered Me” during these “journeys,” they precipitated a **greater** descent than was decreed from Above. So, what is the proof that **these** descents were also destined to bring about an eventual ascent?

²⁰ *Yeshayahu* 12:1.

We could say that a **further** descent can only be rectified by a higher, more profound power, and therefore, by falling further, a person is brought to even greater heights. But this, seemingly, only applies “going forward,” after already having completed a process of rectification and elevation. How can we say that **these** (additional) descents are **essentially** an aspect of ascent?²¹

The truth is, however, as the Mittlerer Rebbe explains at length²² [based on the *Midrash*,²³ which links the verse, “awesome in His deeds towards man,”²⁴ to *Adam Harishon’s*²⁵ sin with the tree of knowledge, explaining that he was “entrapped”²⁶]: “Sometimes the evil inclination can overpower a person and cause him to sin” only because “the evil inclination is instigated from Above to incite the person to sin.”²⁷

This in no way contradicts the principle of “free choice” and (therefore) reward and punishment. For “instigation from Above which arouses evil to overpower good”²⁸ works covertly, so that a person does not sense it. Therefore, it does not compel his choice (the same way that Hashem’s omniscience does not force a person’s hand).

²¹ {It seems that the Rebbe here is distinguishing between Hashem’s acts, which are always done for the sake of an eventual revealed good, and human acts, which can be done without good intentions.}

²² *Toras Chaim*, “*Toldos*,” s.v. “*veyiten lecha*,” ch. 10 ff.

²³ *Tanchuma*, “*Veyeishev*,” sec. 4. {Adam was created on the sixth day of Creation, and Hashem informed him in a roundabout way that He had brought death into the world, as it says: “For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.” (*Bereishis* 2:17) To what may this be compared? It may be compared to a man who wished to divorce his wife. Before he enters his home, he writes out a divorce document, and then enters his house with the divorce document in hand. He then seeks a circuitous way to hand it to her. He says to her: “Give me some water that I may drink.” She does so, and when he takes the glass from her hand, he tells her: “Here is your divorce.” She asks: “What sin have I committed?” “Leave my house” he retorts, “you have served me a warm drink.” “Apparently you already knew,” she replies, “that I would serve you a warm drink when you prepared the bill of divorce you brought with you.” And that is what Adam told the Holy One, blessed is He: Master of the universe, two thousand years before You created the world, You had {written} the Torah as an artisan, as it says: “Then was I by Him, as an artisan; and I was day by day all delight.” (*Mishlei* 8:30) (The repetition of the word *day* indicates that) two thousand years (had passed since He wrote the Torah). In the Torah, it says: “This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent.” (*Bamidbar* 19:14). If You had not previously decreed death for mankind, You would not have said so in the Torah. The fact is, You introduced the threat of death against me in a roundabout way.}

²⁴ *Tehillim* 66:5.

²⁵ {Lit., “the first man,” referring to the biblical Adam.}

²⁶ {In the Hebrew original, the word for “awesome” is עלילה, which can also mean to “libel” or “entrap.”}

²⁷ *Toras Chaim*, “*Toldos*,” s.v. “*veyiten lecha*,” p. 13a.

²⁸ *Toras Chaim*, *ibid.*, p. 15d.

It turns out that **these** descents were also at the outset intended, because through repentance, “there is an **advantage** of light {that comes} from darkness”²⁹ specifically, by transforming deliberate sins into merits.

8.

BEFORE AND AFTER

There were two types of descents in “the places where they angered Me”: (a) a journey when it was **palpably** sensed that the **King** “took him to a different place” (the descent); and (b) a journey that superficially, appeared to be a product of their free choice, whereas in actuality, the King “took” them there — but this {involvement of the King} was hidden from them. These two types of journeys characterize the difference between the journeys that the Jews made before, and after, the Splitting of the Sea.

Our Sages say³⁰ that “had the Jewish people been worthy, then as soon as their feet had emerged from the Sea, they would have entered the land {of Israel}.” Meaning, their journeys after the Splitting of the Sea (“from the sea”) came as a consequence of them being “unworthy” — due to their sins — unlike their journeys before reaching the Sea, which would have needed to be taken even “had the Jewish people been worthy.”

The explanation is as follows: Their {journey through the} “desert,” in its fullest sense, only began after the Splitting of the Sea, whereas their earlier journeys were an intermediate stage between the settled territory (Egypt) and the desert.

In spiritual terms, this means as follows: The “desert” is a place about which it says“(Supernal) man does not live there,”³¹ veritably, a place of *kelipah*³² which **opposes** the Divine Will. The way leading into the desert is

²⁹{*Koheles* 13:13.}

³⁰ *Sifri Devarim* 1:2.

³¹ *Yirmiyahu* 2:6.

³² {*Kelipah* translates literally as “a shell” or “a peel.” The term refers to anything that conceals, and thus opposes G-dliness, just as a shell or a peel conceals the fruit within. *Kelipah* is often used to refer to evil or impurity.}

also not a **settled** place (for Supernal Man), but it also does not **oppose** the Divine Will. This is the system of descent as established from Above (based on Torah).

This explains **simply and openly** how the three examples in the parable fit with the three journeys {from Egypt} until the Splitting of the Sea — because only on these three journeys did the King lead the *prince* in a **revealed** manner. In contrast, the subsequent journeys were (superficially) an outcome of the free choice exercised by the Jewish people who at that point became unworthy.

9.

CONCEALMENT, REVELATION, AND CHOICE

The message of the three journeys, during which it was clearly the King who ‘led’ them, is depicted in the three examples (of the parable): “we slept,” “we cooled off,” and “you had a headache.” [All three are **not** considered true illnesses (connected to **sin**). Even the state in which “you had a headache” is not an “illness,” as Rashi remarks (regarding the statement of our Sages,³³ “Any ache...”): “*ache* — a **slight** discomfort that is temporary and mild.”

In order for a Jew’s *avodah* to be in accord with the directive expressed by the verse, “life and death I have placed before you... **choose**... {life}”³⁴ {i.e., for a Jew to have free choice}, three **innovations** are needed:

a) His soul must **come down** from a place of *light* and revelation into a “place” of concealment, absent of *light*. Otherwise, {the Divine intent expressed by the verse} “I have placed before you today... **death**,” would not be realized. And its realization is necessary because it enables the possibility of choosing the opposite of life and light — Heaven protect us.

³³ *Shabbos* 11a.

³⁴ *Devarim* 30:19.

b) Also present must be: “**The life... which I have placed before you.**” Within this place characterized by a withdrawal of *light*, there must be a revelation of *light* — “He adjoined to it the attribute of mercy.”³⁵

c) In order for there to be **free** choice, his **animalistic** soul must also possess **intellect of its own**, which can find a “benefit” in choosing the opposite of *light* and life, G-d forbid. [If (the animalistic soul) is inclined to choose “death” based solely on its emotions, then the alternative is not equal-balanced (and naturally, he will have no free choice). This is especially so since then, the intellect (of the G-dly soul) would always overpower the {animal soul’s} emotions,” since a person is essentially intellectual.]

These {three innovations} are {alluded to by} the three examples, “we slept,” “we cooled off,” and “you had a headache”:

- a) Sleep is “one sixtieth of death,”³⁶ a state in which a person’s intellect becomes hidden and removed, etc. This refers to {the world when G-dliness is in} a state of complete concealment.
- b) “We cooled off” refers to the fact that the purpose of the concealment is for a subsequent revelation {of G-dliness}. Furthermore, “He adjoined to it the attribute of mercy.” Meaning, Hashem “**cooled off**” the severe intensity of the concealment.
- c) “You had a **headache**” refers to the intellect of the animalistic soul that enables a person to choose “death,” G-d forbid.

With this explanation, we can understand why the examples of “*we* slept” and “*we* cooled off” are written in plural, whereas “*you* had a headache” is written in singular: The state of concealment {“we slept”} and (the ultimate purpose of) revelation {“we cooled off”} relate to the **King** {because it is the King who hides and reveals himself}. In contrast, “you had

³⁵ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 12, par. 16.

³⁶ *Berachos* 57b.

a headache” only applies to the King’s **son** {since he is the only one who can freely choose “death”}.

10.

TRANSFORMING SINS INTO MERITS

We explained above (in section 7) that some descents are a consequence of a person’s bad choices. Even though this is true outwardly, nevertheless, in point of fact, they are part of Hashem’s original plan. However, the King {Hashem} “directs” **these** descents in a secretive manner.

This is why the first three journeys {that the Jews undertook to leave Egypt} (we slept... you had a headache) encapsulate all of their journeys. Even subsequent descents (which happened as a result of their free choice) were ultimately orchestrated by Hashem.

Rashi, in his Torah commentary, “the wine of Torah,”³⁷ (quotes the *Midrash* “you had a headache,” and) adds “**etcetera**.” By adding “etcetera,” Rashi alludes to a real “sickness,” G-d forbid, which **follows** from having “a headache” (brought about through a person’s free choice). This, too, was not caused by the son in isolation; it happened on the journey on which the king “**took him...**” in order to heal him.

It is clear, therefore, that the entire purpose of the “illness” was purely for the sake of restoring the health of the prince, so that “deliberate sins are transformed into merits.”³⁸ Not only does this transformation apply “going forward,” but moreover, “his sins will become uprooted **retroactively**”³⁹ (since that was His intention **from the outset**).

³⁷ *Hayom Yom*, p. 70. {Rashi’s commentary contains “the wine of Torah,” i.e., the deeper teachings of *Torah*.}

³⁸ *Yoma* 86b.

³⁹ Rashi’s commentary on *Yoma* 86a, s.v. “*kan meahavah*”; see at length *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, p. 185 ff.

This {revolutionary reformation} will be realized openly and completely with the coming of our righteous *Moshiach*. Then, “their return journey” will be complete, and “when the sun will shine with all its strength,”⁴⁰ the true and deeper reason for the “journeys” through exile will be revealed. May it be very soon.

-From talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Matos-Masei* and on the 5th of Menachem Av, 5725 (1965); *maamar Basi LeGani*, 5731 (1971)

⁴⁰ *Shoftim* 5:31; see *Tanya*, ch. 26.