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DAF KESHER

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DVAR TORAH CHAZAK CHAZAK VENITCHAZEIK

This week, at the close of the public Torah reading of the entire book of Bamidbar, many synagogues throughout the world will follow the widespread custom of calling out “*Chazak chazak venitchazeik*” (some pronounce it *venitchazak*), “Be strong, be strong, let us strengthen ourselves!” (Some have the custom to call out “*chazak*” at the end of every Torah reading).

What is behind this beautiful custom and what message does it have for us all in Tamuz 5774?

The Pri Chadash (Orach Chaim 139:11) suggests that this practice is based on a passage in the Talmud (Berachot 32b) – “Four things need strengthening: Torah, good deeds, prayer, and *derech erez* (literally, the way of the land – here, Rashi explains, it refers to professional life).” Torah requires strengthening, so as we finish a book of the Torah we publicly strengthen ourselves.

How should this be done? First, Rashi comments that a person should strengthen himself constantly and with all of his strength – *tamid* and *b’chol kocho*. We must give it our all, maximizing our time and energy. Note also that we strengthen **each other**. The Torah reader calls out to others to be strong, and adds *venitchazeik*, and **we** should strengthen ourselves, then we all answer back.

What is common to all four of these – Torah, good deeds, prayer, and professional life – causing them all to require strengthening? The Maharal (Netivot Olam, Netiv Derech Eretz, Chapter One) explains that all four demand **overcoming opposition**. Torah needs the most strengthening, because it is high level spirituality in an extremely physical world. Good deeds come up against the challenges of the yetzer hara, the evil inclination; and prayer arouses accusations from forces above, for in prayer one requests things he might not really deserve. Even *derech erez*, even professional life – (as Rashi says) for the craftsman, merchant, or soldier – requires strengthening, because it involves using one’s *seichel*, acting with intelligence, even when the lower parts of our being militate against it.

The Gemara’s source that *derech erez* requires *chizuk* is what David’s general Yoav (Shmuel II 10:12) said to his brother Avishai before they led Israel’s forces into a challenging war to be fought on two fronts – not only against Amon, but also against their ally Aram. Said Yoav to his brother: חֲזַק וְנִתְחַזַּק בְּעַד הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵינוּ עָמְנָנוּ וּבְעַד עָרֵי אֱלֹקֵינוּ וְה’ יַעֲשֶׂה הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵינוּ – Be strong, and let us strengthen each other for the sake of our nation and the cities of our God, and Hashem will do that which is good in His eyes. We must utilize all the powers God has given us, but the results are in His hands.

In Tamuz 5774, as Israel faces deep challenges and opposition both at home and abroad, Jews call out, as Yoav did, “Be strong, and let us strengthen each other,” for our people and for the cities of our land. We pray that Hashem protect His people, and give strength to our soldiers and leaders, the residents of Israel’s south and the entire country, and Jews all over the world. May we merit to see the ultimate Divine Goodness speedily in our days.

STUDY GUIDE CITY OF REFUGE – MIKVAH FOR THE SOUL

Our parshah (Bamidbar 35:9-34) tells how the accidental murderer must run to one of Israel's cities of refuge. Besides protecting the murderer from the vengeance of the murder victim's relatives, the stay in city of refuge, the עיר מקלט, also gives him atonement for his sin – he is forbidden to leave the city until the death of the high priest, the *Kohen Gadol*. He is, in a way, imprisoned in the city. Rabbi Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, in his *Meshech Chochmah*, reveals a third function of the murderer's stay in the city of refuge.

<p>Meshech Chochmah Bamidbar 35:33 Living in the city of refuge is similar to the purity water brings; it is a cleansing of the soul.</p>	<p>משך חכמה במדבר לה: לג והישיבה בעיר מקלט הוי כעין טהרת המים, רחיצת הנפש:</p>
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A prominent verse drives the *Meshech Chochmah's ir miklat-mikveh* analogy. [Rabbi Yehudah Cooperman, in his footnotes on the *Meshech Chochmah*, notes the play on words: רציחה-רחיצה, murder-washing.] Murder, says the Torah, is not only bad, but a cause of impurity, *tumah* (see Shavuot 8b). The Torah warns against taking money to allow the murderer to avoid his stay in the city of refuge. This warning is followed by this closing verse of the entire section about murder:

<p>Bamidbar 35:34 And you should not (through allowing a murderer to pay off and stay in Israel outside the city of refuge) defile the land you are living on, that I dwell within. For I am God, who dwells within the Children of Israel.</p>	<p>במדבר לה: לד ולא תטמא את הארץ אשר אתם יושבים בה אשר אני שכן בתוכה כי אני ירוך שכן בתוך בני ישראל:</p>
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It follows that the stay in the city of refuge has a purifying effect, like that of a mikveh.

The *Meshech Chochmah's* analogy illuminates why the murderer stays in the city of refuge until the death of the *Kohen Gadol*, the high priest.

<p>Meshech Chochmah Bamidbar 35:33 Complete purity comes in a way similar to the purity needed for an impure <i>Kohen</i> to once again eat <i>terumah</i>. He needs to wait after he has gone to the mikveh for the sun to set. Similarly, here, the murderer requires a "sunset" to achieve complete purification. This is the death of the <i>Kohen Gadol</i>, which is the true sunset.</p>	<p>משך חכמה במדבר לה: לג וטהרה לגמרי הוי כמו טהרה לתרומה שצריך הערב שמש, כן הכא צריך הערב שמש, וזה מות הכה"ג, שזה הערב שמש האמיתי:</p>
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Just as purification for eating *terumah* requires *tevilah* and *haarev shemesh* – immersion and sunset – so the murderer requires a stay in the city of refuge and the national sunset of the death of the *Kohen Gadol*.

FACULTY WANDERINGS, BY RABBI ASHER BRANDER

[Rabbi Brander, Rav and Rosh Kollel of Los Angeles' LINK Kollel and Shul, is a scholar-in-residence at Shapell's Darche Noam. We are honored to publish this chapter from Rabbi Brander's book, **Teachings: In-depth Reflections on the Parshah**, published by Mosaica Press.]

In most Ashkenazi synagogues around the world, the forty two desert journeys of Bnei Yisrael that open our parsha are a reason for the *ba'al koreh* to break into song, into a specially uplifting four part cadence that echoes the *shiras hayam* (song at the sea). Not to be outdone, a fascinating Yekkish (German Jewish) custom finds the forty two journeys written in special Ha'azinu [double column] *shira* style. Finally, Magen Avraham [428:8] on the Shulchan Aruch records the custom, based on Kabbalistic notions, that we don't break up the

forty two journeys at all - making the first aliyah a rather lengthy one, and extending the Monday/Thursday readings to a whopping fifty-three *pesukim*.

All this for mostly nameless journeys, already taken and never to be repeated, - so what's going on here? We embark on our journey with an enigmatic *pasuk* [Bamidbar, 33:2]: "Moshe recorded their departures for their journeys according to Hashem's command; these were the journeys for their departures."

It is hard to miss the inversion of the journeys/departures – we will return to this point.

A simple question: Why record all the pit-stops in the first place? Certain famous and/or notorious locations deserve special mention; names like Refidim (Amalek attack), Yam Suf [split-sea], Marah (bitter waters) certainly bear recap; but would anyone have blinked had the Torah omitted almon divlasayma or reesa? To Rashi, the Torah's expansive delineation is to demonstrate Hashem's kindness. When we consider that the first fourteen journeys took place during the pre-spy marches to Israel [the 1st sixteen months] and eight happened on the back end [after thirty nine years] re-march to Israel, we realize that even though the Jews were condemned to be desert wanderers, they enjoyed more than a modicum of stability. In fact, Bnei Yisrael remained in one specific location [Kadesh] for 20 years. So their hardships were somewhat mitigated – for Hashem's munificence extends to all.

Probing Rashi a bit deeper only frustrates us, for we need to understand why some places receive a mere 12 hour stay, while in others the Jews' pitched their tents for close to twenty years.

Rambam, [Moreh Nevuchim, 3:50] feels the Torah's focus on extensive details is to verify/illustrate the miraculous nature of the desert existence [an effective antidote to historical revisionism.] By listing the specific locales, the barrenness of the desert is accentuated, highlighting the Divine, miraculous sustenance of a nation, more than two million strong. Of course, the flip side of Rambam's coin, demonstrates the beauty of *chessed neurayich*, the childlike faith and kindness that Bnei Yisroel demonstrates as it blindly follows God into the wilderness – a nation willing to enter the desert without having it all "worked out". It is this latter theme that Seforno finds in the expansive listings of their desert sojourn.

It is Rashi's 2nd insight, spiced with a mystical Ohr HaChaim notion, that moves me greatly.

First we must cite Seforno, who tackles our textual question of journeys for their departures/ departures for the journey by distinguishing between two types of travel: We sometimes leave in order to go, while other moments require us to go because we must leave. In the former it is the destination that is important, while for the latter it is the departure that is key. Holocaust Jews seeking refuge were not picky about their destination; they are a prime example of the latter notion, while the North American aliyah movement, who wrested themselves from the comfortable 'burbs of New York, or bid adieu to their California palm trees, are an example of the former. So too, the Jew in the desert had places he desperately wanted to depart from, and destinations he longed for. Now, the dual terminology of the text becomes clear, for certain places inspired the Jew to leave, while other destinations inspired him to look ahead. We now turn to Rashi – who presents another notion for the Torah's focus on detail:

R' Tanchuma expounds: This is compared to a king whose son was ill, and he brought him to a distant place for treatment. When they returned, the father began enumerating all the journeys. He said to him, "Here, we slept; here, we were chilled; here, your head ached, etc."

For Rabbi Tanchuma, the recap of our parsha's journey represents a nostalgic backward glance at places fraught with significant experiences, things that were and no longer are. The backwards glance presents the beneficiary [the son] with a deeper retrospective appreciation of what was accomplished at each stage. Why then does the Torah list every last journey? Because each and every place was an engine of growth, a necessary stop in the development and strengthening of Bnei Yisrael so that they were finally ready to dwell

in God's palace – the Holy Land of Israel.

In his profundity, Rashi provides us with a total redefinition of a journey. For most, travel is a means, a way to close the gap between two points. For the Jew however, the journey is the thing itself. Amalek, our theological opposite, catch us on the road[1]. In this world, a Jew is always on the road, and his life is constantly under construction, It is a dynamic work in progress. Woe to the one who thinks there's nothing more to do.

In a mystical and wondrous restatement of the same notion, Ohr Hachaim teaches that Bnei Yisrael were to draw out the sparks of holiness found in every desert locale, and internalize them. Once accomplished, it was time to move on. The more resident kedusha, the lengthier the stay; the less sanctity, the quicker the stop. Thus, they were in Kadesh for 19 years – for these infusions of kedusha fueled their journey with spiritual growth, preparing them for their ultimate entrance into Eretz Yisrael.



Rabbi Asher Brander
Rav and Rosh Kollel
LINK Kollel and Shul, Los Angeles
Scholar in Residence
at Shapell's Darche Noam,
Summer 5774

Three millennia after our forefathers walked the desert on their way to the Promised Land, the collective and the individual Jew remain wanderers. Many a Jew finds himself in places he had never dreamed of and perhaps in locations he cannot even spell. [Consider the Chabad kid who grew up in 770 and is now an emissary in Kathmandu, Nepal.] And like Seforno's duality, many are aching to leave, while others are quite happy where they are – perhaps even forgetting where they need to be.

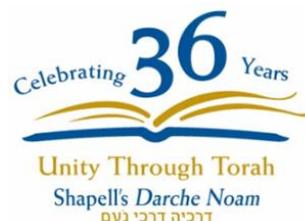
For those that want more, who feel the need to move ahead, [get married, have children, more time, deeper avodas Hashem, better job, retire, improve health, fiscal security, ...], the challenge that Rashi/Ohr HaChaim and Seforno pose is that of drawing out the sanctity inherent in every life circumstances. We must consider: Maybe I did not plan to be here and perhaps I won't be here for that long, but while, and now that I am here, it behooves me to probe how and why I am, how can I grow from this, and where will my aspirations lead me.

To turn our journeys into destinations and our thoroughfares into points of departure becomes the lifelong task of the Jew. Specifically this time of year, the saddest part of our calendar requires that we consider how we got here – for it may just be our only way out. To the extent, that we can cultivate an awareness and vigilance of this task we will merit to reach our destination

[1] My friend Rabbi Pinchas Lebovic taught that Mishna Bava Kamma [1:1] calls man a *mav'eh* on the basis of the word *ba'ee*, the Aramaic term for desire/prayer. It is our desires, dreams and aspirations that form the essential definition of man.

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at www.darchenoam.org & +972-2-651-1178
5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem

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ecahan@darchenoam.org



This issue is dedicated in memory of:
Shayndel bat Yaakov Halevi, z"l

**We remember all of the soldiers, the kedoshim, z"l, who gave their lives defending the people of Israel
and the land of Israel in operation Tzuk Eitan. יהי זכרם ברוך.**

May Hashem send a speedy recovery to the wounded, יבל"ח, and בשורות טובות to all of Israel.