

Like a child running away

"They traveled a distance of three days"

(Bamidbar 10:33)

Chazal explain that they traveled from Mount Sinai a distance of three days like a child running away from school. This implies that the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was a heavy burden upon them, which they sought to escape, so they ran away.

This Midrash requires explanation. We are talking about important people who are called by Chazal, the "dor de'ah – generation of wisdom." They had just received the Torah and saw Divine revelations. Eye to eye, they saw the Shechinah of Hashem, and the revelation of Hashem at Mount Sinai. Certainly they were instilled with the love of Hashem and His Torah; then why did they suddenly want to escape the place like a child running away from school?

We need to understand how one infers from the words "They traveled a distance of three days," that they were running away like a child escaping. Why can't we explain the words "They traveled" like by all other journeys that they simply traveled in the Wilderness, without explaining that they looked to escape? In addition, we can explain that the words "They traveled a distance of three days from the Mountain of the L-rd" signifies that they took with them the impression of the Mountain of the L-rd and the revelations there, as the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh says regarding the pasuk, "They journeyed from Rephidim," (homiletically – laxity) explaining that they departed from their laxity in Torah, meaning that now they reinforced their study of Torah.

I would like to suggest with siyata d'Shemaya, that Chazal explain like this because the behavior of Bnei Yisrael was very puzzling. A short while after Bnei Yisrael received the Torah and rose up to exalted heights spiritually, they suddenly experienced a steep drop, which manifested itself in various complaints against Hashem and His messengers; whether complaints about the lack of water, or lack of meat, and afterwards finding fault with Eretz Yisrael and slandering the Land.

Chazal were perplexed by these cases and asked how it was possible that those who received the Torah accompanied by thunderous lightning and the sound of the Shofar, and saw wondrous miracles, suddenly rebelled and fell time after time into the trap of the Yetzer Hara. Why didn't the Torah protect and guard them? After all the Torah is the antidote to the Yetzer Hara. Thus Chazal concluded that it must be that there was indeed some flaw in their acceptance of the Torah. Consequently, the Torah did not influence them to change their ways for the better. What was the flaw? That they ran away from the Mountain of the L-rd like a child running away from school.

It is true that they were obligated to travel from the place according to Hashem's command, as it is stated, "At the bidding of the L-rd, the children of Israel traveled, and at the bidding of the Lord, they encamped." But they shouldn't have left the place joyfully and hurriedly. Inwardly, they should have felt sorrow and difficulty in having to leave, and a disadvantage, that it was too bad that they had to leave such a holy and sanctified place. They should have expressed longing for the Mountain of the L-rd, a place that was so holy that even the animals were prohibited in grazing nearby, and now they had to leave the place suddenly. But instead they left the place without feeling any loss, and this is the proof that their acceptance of the Torah was like a burden and not a privilege. Chazal explain that they feared that perhaps Hashem would add more commandments. This is surprising because they should have understood that a person without Torah is like a body without a soul. So too at Mount Sinai, as long as they were there and Hashem was at the mountain top, Mount Sinai remained holy. However, after the holy Shechinah departed from there, and they had to leave the place, the place became like any other location. Now it was incumbent upon Bnei Yisrael to create in every place that they would be a dwelling where the Shechinah would reside. But they behaved exactly in an opposite manner and ran away like a child running away from school, without bothering to create a dwelling for Hashem in another place, as Mount Sinai had been.

And so it is regarding prayer. Even if one prayed with concentration and devotion, but at the end of the prayer, when reciting "Aleinu l'shabayach" he already left the Beit Haknesset, he demonstrates that the entire prayer was a burden and hardship for him, and he was just waiting for the moment that he could remove the heavy burden from his neck... Certainly such a prayer is not successful and it is not whole-hearted. Similarly, when Bnei Yisrael left the Mountain of Hashem and immediately sinned and voiced false accusations against Hashem and His leadership, it indicates that they ran away as a child who runs away from school, and they were glad to leave Mount Sinai quickly, because they still didn't understand fully the value and importance of the Torah. This is why even accepting the Torah did not protect them and help them improve their ways, because if they had appreciated the magnitude and importance of the Torah, they would have felt bad leaving the holy site of the Mountain of the L-rd, even though they were obligated to continue on their journey according to Hashem's command.

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Hillulah of
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Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita



Words of our Sages

No one is infallible

There is a story that illustrates to what extent challenges bring a person closer to Hashem. Even if he is not a Jew, he can recognize Hashem clearly. My dear disciple, Mr. Haver, whom I merited with the help of Hashem to bring him to full repentance, met his friend, Mr. Rivero, in Argentina, who is not Jewish.

This man was enormously wealthy and had many assets. He was missing nothing. In their emotional meeting (on May, 2011) after greeting each other warmly, an interesting conversation developed between them. My disciple Mr. Haver told Mr. Rivero that his Rabbi, Rabbi David, shlit"a, was presently in Argentina, and he asked if he would accompany him to receive a blessing from the Rabbi as well. Mr. Rivero replied proudly with complete self-assurance, "I have everything, so why do I need a blessing...I have lots of money and a wife and children. I am not missing anything."

And by the way he added, "My wife is Jewish." Mr. Haver then told him, "If so, you have some connection to the Jewish people, and moreover, your children are Jewish."

To this Mr. Rivero responded scornfully and said, "My wife and children have nothing to do with Judaism! Every week they attend the Church services (Rachmana litzlan) and they have no trace of Judaism." My disciple Mr. Haver continued to relate, "At that moment I gazed at him as if seeing a thoughtless and foolish person who does not understand at all what the purpose of man is in the world. Inwardly I recited the blessing, "for not having made me a gentile." I thanked Hashem from the bottom of my heart that "He did not assign our portion like theirs nor our lot like all their multitudes."

Two days later, Mr. Rivero called his friend Mr. Haver frantically. On the other end, he unmistakably heard a broken voice that was evidently tearful. He begged to arrange an urgent meeting with Rabbi David...

Mr. Haver was puzzled. Only two days ago Mr. Rivero expressed outright contempt for the Rabbi's blessing. He even responded with arrogance that he did not need blessings at all, since he possessed everything he needed. What happened suddenly?!

His astonishment did not last long, and in a broken voice Mr. Rivero told him that suddenly he did not feel well. When he was rushed to the hospital, he underwent tests and the result was that he was diagnosed with the cursed disease, may G-d have mercy on him.

In a flash, his peaceful life turned chaotic. He found himself in a storm and turbulent sea of treatments and medications, and he was beside himself. In his grief, he recalled his meeting with Mr. Haver, who spoke to him about the Rabbi's blessing, and now he wanted to be blessed in the merit of his saintly ancestors to be saved and get cured.

Within a few hours, he came to see me and told me the story. I turned to him and blessed him with all my heart that Hashem should send him a complete cure and restore his health as before. I am sure that if he would recover, it would cause a great Kiddush and Hashem and Hashem's Name would be glorified.

In addition, when he came to me, he offered me an enormous sum of money for the benefit of our holy institutions, but I rejected his generous contribution, because my sole intention was to glorify Hashem's Name in the world.

This story is etched in my heart. I thought a lot about it and concluded to myself: How wrong a person can be thinking arrogantly that nothing can befall him. Mr. Rivero was so sure of himself at first, and his heart was full of pride, believing that "My strength and the might of my hand that has accumulated this wealth for me." He thought that everything was in his control, and his wealth and his family's welfare was secure. But in a moment he experienced catastrophe. His empire crumbled before his eyes when his health failed, and he became entirely broken. This is because everything ultimately depends on the Ribono Shel Olam.

What opened his eyes to see truth? His suffering and anguish made him see and understand the true reality. Therefore, it is forbidden for a person to ignore the truth that everything is only in Hashem's control, and one should not wait, G-d forbid, until he is sent a painful reminder from Heaven. He must recall his infallibility at all times and always realize Hashem's Divine Providence. He should always aspire to advance continuously in his study of Torah and fear of Hashem.

The humility of our leaders

"Now this man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth" (Bamidbar 12:3)

How was it possible for Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the greatest of all people, to be humble?

The Chafetz Chaim explains that Moshe claimed that there was no comparison between him and Bnei Yisrael, since he had ascended to Heaven and merited learning Torah from Hashem. Therefore, he did not take any credit for himself.

"If others would have had a Rebbe like me, they could also have been like me," he thought.

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin added that when Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to go and redeem the Jewish people, Moshe asked (Shemot 3:11), "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" It seems that Hashem should have answered him: "Only you are suitable! Only you were chosen to redeem them! Don't refuse this position, because then the Jews will remain in Egypt forever!"

But in fact, Hashem told him something else: "For I will be with you." This implies that "really you are not suitable for this great mission, but I will be with you and help you."

We may wonder, if Moshe Rabbeinu is indeed unsuitable for the role of the Redeemer, and even Hashem thinks so, then why doesn't Hashem choose someone more suitable?

The reason is because Hashem especially loves those who view themselves in a humble manner...It is particularly the "broken" people who merit the greatest affection and closeness to Hashem, as it is stated (Tehillim 51:19): "You will not despise a broken and crushed heart."

The Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim, Rabbi Shlomo Moshe Amar, shlit"a, spoke about the great degree of humility of the gaon Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, zt"l, (the hillula of this tzaddik is on this Friday!):

At the conclusion of the mourning of the great Rabbi Shalom Mashash, zt"l, one of the elders of Moroccan Jewry and the Rabbi of Jerusalem, a memorial ceremony was held in his memory at the Porat Yosef Yeshiva. There were a few leaders of Torah in attendance, among them were those that served as "Rishon L'Tzion, like Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, zt"l, and ybd"l, Rav Bakshi Doron, and I.

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu stood and spoke in public, when suddenly, in the midst of his lecture, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, ztk"l entered.

When Rabbi Eliyahu saw Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, ztk"l, enter, he stopped his lecture, stepped down from the podium in his honor, and greeted him.

"I told him," Rabbi Amar says, "that in the meantime, until Rabbi Ovadia rests a bit, your honor can continue to say divrei Torah."

But Rabbi Eliyahu refused and told me: "We must give respect in honor of the Torah of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef." And he would not speak in Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's presence.

The Haftarah

"Sing and rejoice" (Zecharia 2:14)

The connection to the parashah: The haftarah mentions the Menorah and the lamps that the navi Zecharia envisioned, and the parashah discusses the commandment to Aharon HaCohen about lighting the lamps toward the face of the Menorah.



Guard Your Tongue

The Power of Speech

Avak Lashon Hara

There are times when a speaker makes a positive statement about a person and intends it as such, but negative and harmful information can be inferred from his words. Rabbinically, this is prohibited, under a category referred to as avak lashon hara, lit. the "dust" of lashon hara. An example of this is one who says: "Who would have believed that he would have come this far?" Or he says: "Let's not talk about him because it may be lashon hara," and the like.

Also praising one's fellow before his enemy is also included in the prohibition of avak lashon hara, because it causes his enemy to respond with slanderous comments.



Chazak U'Baruch

An amazing story is brought in the sefer "Haposek" about Maran Rabbi Vosner, ztk"l, who as we know worked tirelessly to raise the level of sanctity of the Jewish people. He fought against harmful technological devices, so that they should not enter the camps of those that fear Hashem, and fought against those who breach the laws of Kedushah.

The son of Rabbi Vosner, Rabbi Mordechai Elimelech Vosner, shlit"a, relates that once in the summer of 1969, Rabbeinu stayed in Tzefat to relax. During the entire day he would learn Torah as he usually did, and only for one hour he would go out to breathe the fresh air. As is well-known, Rabbeinu was very careful about maintaining his health, but even during his walk, he would take along some holy sefarim.

"On one of our trips, we wandered over a mountain of the Galilee. Rabbeinu took with him on that day a Tehillim, but it was not a regular Tehillim, but an antique, bound in an old binding, which included a commentary of one of the great Sages of previous generations. The Tehillim was worth a fortune, and seasoned dealers were willing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to purchase it.

It happened on that day that the Tehillim was forgotten on one of the tables in the place. A few hours after the evening prayers, we noticed the absence of the Tehillim. It is easy to imagine the great concern this caused, especially since in those days there were no paved roads between Meron and Tzefat. A routine trip to the place was very complicated, even during the daytime.

One of the Rabbi's escorts, who felt guilty about the loss of the Tehillim, wanted to return to the mountain and bring the sefer. Some of the boys who had come on the trip turned to the Rabbi's driver and asked him to take them to search for the lost sefer, but the driver feared traveling on the long winding and unpaved road, especially since it was already dark. In the end, he agreed that if Rabbeinu would give his blessing to arrive safely, he would do it. I turned to my father and asked his permission to turn around and go back. Father shook his head no and said firmly: I forbid you to go there under any circumstances.

Innocently, I thought that father's objection to the trip back stemmed from safety concerns. I thought he feared the long winding roads in the dark. I tried convincing him that the driver was aware of the danger and difficulty and promised that he would travel with increased caution and slowly. But father was not convinced, and he stuck to his refusal to turn around. When I continued to argue, he told me: 'My son, you think that I do not agree to turn around because of safety reasons. But that is not the reason. Who knows what is going on there now at the tourist site. I am afraid that you will see forbidden immoral scenes at this hour. Therefore, I absolutely forbid turning back there.'

But what will become of your precious Tehillim? Father replied, 'It is preferable to lose the precious Tehillim, so long as I do not, G-d forbid, get stuck seeing a forbidden immoral scene.'

Thirty-five years passed since that event, and in the year 2003, father was relaxing in one of the cities in Austria. One day one of the wealthy local Jews came to him and said: Honorable Rabbi, I would like to present you with something. Recently I bought from an antique dealer a valuable Tehillim. After I bought it, I noticed that it was stamped inside with the name Shmuel Halevi Vosner, and therefore, I came to give it to you as a gift.

When I phoned father that Friday, as I usually did, my father told me excitedly: 'You know what a miracle occurred? You remember the Tehillim that was left in the mountains of Meron? This week after thirty-five years the Tehillim returned to us!'

I was very excited to hear the news and I realized that regarding this it is stated: "No wrong shall be caused for the righteous." Father had not wanted to retrieve the Tehillim at that time because of his meticulousness in guarding his eyes from impurity, so from Heaven the Tehillim was returned to him."

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v' Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik
Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlit'a



When silence talks

"They traveled a distance of three days from the mountain of the L-rd" (Bamidbar 10:33)

Chazal explain that they traveled a distance of three days from Mount Sinai, like a child leaving school and running away. That is how they fled from Mount Sinai.

The accusation against Bnei Yisrael that they fled like children running away from school can be illustrated by the following parable.

Let us imagine that a person has a guest in his house who brings blessing to his host in all material matters, livelihood, health, success, and also in spiritual matters he assists his host in achieving great heights in Avodat Hashem and Yirat Shamayim, all without pay... And then one day if this guest would approach the host and says "I already stayed long enough, and now I am leaving... would the host just wish him good-bye casually? Certainly not. He would definitely make a strong effort to convince him to stay longer in his house...

This is what the accusation against Bnei Yisrael was. They stayed on the Mountain of Hashem and saw salvation and wonders and merited rising to great spiritual heights. Then when Moshe told them that they should leave to go to their Land, they did not object. They didn't come beg, "No, we don't not want to go to the Land, since perhaps there we will become distant from Hashem by engaging in the vanities of this world, since everyone will be involved in his vineyards and orchards, and then what will be with the Torah?! They did not argue in this way at all, but instead remained silent and were willing to leave without any objections.

This is a strong accusation. Why didn't they beg to stay longer? Therefore, they are compared to a child running away from school. And because of this error, they deteriorated further, to the extent that they craved meat. In fact, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai explains that they just sought to complain because they didn't lack meat, and by doing so they ultimately transgressed with the Sin of the Spies and spoke lashon hara. Because of this they remained in the desert for forty years and thus did not circumcise their sons for forty years. All this was caused by their lack of "head and heart," signifying that they did not invest efforts in contemplating properly how to serve Hashem in order to achieve sanctity and sincerity of heart.

When the heart is lacking sanctified thoughts and purity, the Yetzer Hara finds a suitable place to enter and reside within him. This is what we say in the piyut "Ezrainu Kel Chai:" "Harchek na m'aleha chevrat kat hatzoni," meaning: Distance from us the Yetzer hara which is located in the inner chambers of a person.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



The mission of the elderly

“Umiben chamishim shana yashuv mitzava ha’avodah veloh ya’avod ode – From the age of fifty he shall retire from the work legion, and do no more work (Bamidbar 8:25)

The author of the Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz would say:

Every passion has its own period:

During childhood, one craves sweets, toys, etc. When he grows up – he desires money, but when he reaches old age, all his passions cease – besides for the desire for honor, which originates from the vice of haughtiness...

This is as stated, “From the age of fifty (implying old age) he shall retire from the work legion,” since he does not have to work so hard to overcome his passions as in his younger years. But thereafter, “v’loh – no” signifying self-negation, this is a Yetzer Hara he still must work to overcome, as is stated further, “ya’avod ode – more work,” meaning he should continue to work more to achieve humility.

Men of Faith

Excerpts from the book *Men of Faith on the lives and deeds of the House of Pinto*

Protecting the Honor of the Torah

Rabbi Yaish Krispin, zt”l, one of the most prominent scholars in the village Wald-Rahil, engaged in a trade for a living. Rabbi Krispin would travel all over Morocco, going from city to city and village to village buying and selling goods.

When the people of the village heard that he was planning a trip to Mogador, his neighbors requested that he take alms and money which they had vowed to donate to Rabbi Chaim Hakatan in Mogador, to distribute to charity. Rabbi Yaish agreed and took with him all the envelopes intended for the tzaddik.

Just as he had stepped out of his village, he heard a loud voice calling, “Rabbi Yaish, Rabbi Yaish!”

It was Mrs. Massouda Vitzman, begging him to deliver money which she had vowed to give the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim. Rabbi Yaish took the money from her, stuffed it in his pocket and continued on his way to Mogador.

Since Rabbi Krispin was not familiar with Mogador and had never seen Rabbi Chaim’s holy countenance, he asked the first Jew that he met in Mogador to instruct him how to get to the Rav’s house.

On his way to Rabbi Chaim’s house, a venerable Jew approached him and asked, “Are you Rabbi Yaish Krispin from the village of Wald-Rahil?”

Rav Krispin answered in the affirmative.

“I am Rabbi Chaim Pinto!”

Rabbi Yaish was slightly taken aback by the unexpected encounter, and Rabbi Chaim continued, “Pesach is drawing close and many Jews are turning to me for assistance to obtain the necessary provisions for the chag. Time is short, and there is a lot of work to be done. I would greatly appreciate it if you could give me the money that people vowed and donated now.”

“The money is packed among my belongings,” Rabbi Krispin explained. “I would like to first go to the hotel and unpack my bags. Then, I will be able to locate the money and give it to the Rav.”

Rabbi Chaim persisted, “You may not move from here until I receive the money. The needs are pressing and there is no time to waste.”

Rabbi Krispin relented and unloaded his bags. He took out the money and handed it to Rabbi Chaim.

“You have something else as well,” Rabbi Chaim commented. Rabbi Yaish told him confidently, “I gave everything to the honorable Rabbi.”

“When you left the city,” the Rav reminded him, “Mrs. Massouda Vitzman asked you to deliver the money that she had pledged. You placed the donation in the pocket of your overcoat. Probably after your difficult journey you forgot about it.”

Rabbi Krispin was astounded by the tzaddik’s ability to perceive distant events through Divine inspiration. He commented in awe, “I’ve heard about the Rav’s honorable reputation in the past, but now, I have witnessed it.” He immediately took the money from the pocket of his overcoat and gave it to the Rav.

Rabbi Chaim hurried to distribute the money among the poor, and Rabbi Krispin proceeded with his business in the city.

When Rabbi Krispin entered the Beit Hakeneset, the local Torah scholars were in the midst of learning Masechet Pesachim, as Chazal instituted (Pesachim, 6a), “One must begin studying the laws of Pesach thirty days prior to the festival.”

Rabbi Krispin sat observing the scene. In the midst of the session, one of the scholars asked a sharp question which contradicted the entire concept under discussion.

Rabbi Krispin began to clarify the issue according to his understanding, until the entire matter was resolved.

Everyone agreed with Rabbi Krispin’s explanation, except for one of the scholars, who did not look upon him favorably. He grumbled out loud, “Has our yeshiva become a city of refuge? Foreigners disturb us!”

Rabbi Krispin understood well to whom the man was referring, but preferred to remain silent and be considered like “those who are humiliated

but do not respond in kind; they hear others embarrassing them, but do not answer back.” The other students present also remained silent, and no one stood up to defend the honor of the scholarly guest.

There was one who did rally to defend the honor of Torah. This was none other than Rabbi Chaim Hakatan. While sitting in his house, he perceived through Divine inspiration all that transpired. He immediately called his attendant R’ Yehuda Ben Ezer and asked him to come with him.

“I sense that Rabbi Krispin is being disgraced, and he is a Torah scholar whom I met this morning. One of the students of the yeshiva humiliated him.”

Rabbi Chaim and his attendant hurried to the Beit Hakeneset. When the students saw the tzaddik, they rose before him and offered him a place to sit. Rabbi Chaim ignored their honorable gestures and addressed them sternly, “I will not sit amongst scoffers, who do not honor important guests and Torah scholars like Rabbi Krispin. This yeshiva is a city of refuge for people like you, and not for brilliant and worthy guests like Rabbi Yaish Krispin, who graced our city.”

The students listened to the tzaddik’s rebuke and realized that they must make amends. Everyone, without exception, begged Rav Krispin’s forgiveness for not defending the honor of the Torah and protesting their friend’s disparagement of him. They also expressed their regret for not having welcomed him cordially, as befitting a scholarly guest coming from a distant city.

Rabbi Krispin accepted their apologies, and after declaring that he wholeheartedly forgave them, continued elucidating the issue at hand until it was clear to all.

After the incident, the scholars learning in the yeshiva of Mogador took upon themselves to be extra careful in the future to welcome every guest and to fulfill the mitzvah of hachnasat orchim with joy, according honor to every person, especially Torah scholars.