



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

Journey

Can you remember what you did on a certain Tuesday, five years ago? How about a particular day last year? How about last month?

When our lives follow a routine, it becomes very difficult to separate one day from the next. The past seems to spread back behind us like an endless gray carpet. Here and there, however, landmarks protrude above the humdrum scenery. A marriage, a birth, a death, a golden anniversary. The same is true when we travel. We remember clearly the five minutes we spent at Niagara Falls as though it were yesterday, although it happened ten years ago. We still smell the rain of a tropical rainstorm on Fiji, the

fumes of a childhood traffic-jam on the way to the Eiffel Tower. Travel makes time significant and memorable.

We talk of life being a journey. The essence of life is to journey, to move, to develop. When G-d appeared to Abraham and told him that he would be the progenitor of a holy nation, it was with the command: "Go to yourself." The essential journey is to the self, to develop the internal landscape of the soul. In order for Abraham to fulfill his potential and be the Father of the Jewish People, he had to go, to journey. Maybe it was for this reason that G-d didn't tell him his destination. For the destination was not the essence of the journey, rather the journey itself.

In this week's Parsha, the Torah lists the 42 encampments

of the Jewish People on their journey from Egypt to the Land of Israel. Every time they move camp the Torah repeats the phrase "They journeyed from... They journeyed from..." Why was it necessary to repeat this phrase with every encampment? Obviously, if they camped in a different place they must have journeyed from the previous place.

The Jewish People's journey through the desert was a spiritual rite of passage between the decadence of Egypt and the Land of Israel flowing with the milk and honey of holiness. It's easier to take the Jew out of Egypt than to take Egypt out of the Jew. It took 41 separate spiritual journeys to impact on the collective spiritual psyche of the Jewish People and ready them to enter the Promised Land. "And they journeyed from..."

LOVEof theLAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Gush Chalav

A major Jewish center in Upper Galilee in older times, Gush Chalav is now a Maronite village.

Known in Latin as Giscala and in Arabic as Jish, the Hebrew name (Block of Milk) indicates that it was located in very fertile surroundings. Yochanan Gush Chalav was one of the leaders of the Jewish revolt against the Romans. In a small domed building on the outskirts of the village are the tombs of two great Talmudic sages, Shemaya and Avtalyon, and in the small valley to the east are the relics of an ancient synagogue dating back some 1700 years.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

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Giving people the benefit of the doubt

To justify questionable behavior, we need not go hunting on an African Safari. The most exotic excuses are often right in our back yard. Take the following story, which I call...

An Elephant With Nasal Congestion

I walked into the staff room at my Yeshiva just as a friend of mine, Michael, was saying to Rabbi Nosson Slifkin: “You smell like an elephant!”

How could I judge Michael favorably here?

The real story is as follows. Rabbi Nosson Slifkin gives Torah tours of the zoo, explaining Torah lessons to learn from different creatures. (He even has a website, www.zootorah.com). He had just come back from giving a tour at the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo, where an elephant sneezed on him! Just before I walked into the room, Rabbi Slifkin told my friend Michael about his encounter with pachydermal phlegm, and they were kidding around about it. Thus, I entered the room to the cry of “You smell like an elephant!” But it was all said in good fun.

Response Line

Peace in Triplicate - Shabbat

Moshe Pripas wrote:

Three years ago my mother-in-law asked why we sing “Shalom Aleichem” (Peace unto You) on Friday night three times. I gave the reason for being a “chazaka” (emphasis) but that itself wasn’t satisfying. Since then I have asked lots of people and nobody ever gave me a different answer.

Dear Moshe,

The Likutei Maharich asks your question. He explains as you did, that repeating something three times adds emphasis. We do the same in other parts of our liturgy, such as in *Kiddush Levana*, the blessing made on the new moon, and the bedtime

angels accompany a person as he walks home from synagogue Friday night. These angels are in addition to the usual angel who accompanies him at all times. Hence, we have three angels in all. Thus we recite “Shalom Aleichem” one time for each angel.

The problem with this answer is that people are usually accompanied by two angels at all times, making four in all. This can be answered according to the Zohar, which states that not two angels but rather two groups of angels accompany a man on Friday night. These, in addition to the usual group of two angels which accompany the person at all times, give us three groups in all. We recite one “Shalom Aleichem” for each group. This also explains the use of the plural “aleichem” —

Shema.

I have heard another answer also: The Talmud states that two

“unto You (plural)” — as well.

From Mars to Jerusalem Jim Silver wrote:

Assuming Mars is ever colonized and Jews live on Mars, will they need to pray UP to face Jerusalem? This question is based on the fact that the orbit of Mars is outside the Earth’s orbit of the Sun.

Dear Jim,

You’ve certainly asked your question to the right Rabbi: When I was in school, I took up space.

Even on Mars you wouldn’t face upwards to pray because one should pray with his head slightly bowed and his eyes downward. Also, facing up towards earth might look like you were praying to a star. A Jewish no-no.

Of course, there may be other valid halachic views on this issue; therefore, when you get to Mars, ask the local Orthodox Rabbi.