

Through the descent – and only through the descent – the Jewish people ascend to a level higher than otherwise possible. The journeys through the desert – each of the forty-two encampments – were a descent leading to the ascent into the land of Israel. Our descent into exile will lead to an ascent into Redemption.

Thus, when we momentarily stumble – when something obstructs our observance or doubts hinder our devotion or our complacency impedes Moshiach – we should not despair. In our darkest moments, we must increase light and joy, that is, Torah and mitzvos. Moshiach's delay is an "encampment" that should not discourage or depress us. Rather we should invest our anticipation, our joyful expectation with more enthusiasm and more vigor, knowing that we are in the final stage of our journeys toward Redemption.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 23, pp. 224-228)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** ע"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi Shagalov**
Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu Ekman**
Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer Marenburg**
Passed away on the second day of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian) ben Reb **Dovid Asniel Ekman (Santiago, Chile)**
Passed away on 24 Shevat, 5769
ת.נ.צ.ג.ה.
AND IN HONOR OF
Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva Shagalov**
DEDICATED BY
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y. and Gittel Rochel Shagalov**

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Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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foot outside the country. How many “journeys” does it take to leave? However, since the word for “Egypt” in Hebrew also means boundaries and limitations, the Torah is telling us something about our individual spiritual growth: in order to leave behind our limitations, the obstacles to our spirituality, we must take many steps, make many journeys. Each phase, each ascent, is a leave-taking, an uprooting and consequent elevation. And the encampments – our accomplishments in Torah, mitzvos and Divine service – are only temporary resting places, way stations on the journey. We must leave them behind and journey forth, go forward. We camp, as the Jewish people did, not to “stand still,” but to gather strength and prepare for the next journey – the next transformation on the way to Moshiach, Redemption and the land of Israel.

What relevance does this examination of the opening verse of the Torah reading have for us today? It is well known that the forty-two journeys of the Jewish people in the wilderness allude not just to an individual’s life, but also to the life of the Jewish people in exile. For we are currently journeying through the “wilderness of the nations.” That being the case, our encampments – the sojourns of the children of Israel among the various nations – are a descent into greater exile. So long as we tarry, however friendly and supportive the country, we have interrupted and suspended our journey. Such a delay impedes and obstructs fulfillment of our true goal, reaching the land of Israel, that is, transforming the world into a dwelling place for G-dliness.

Nevertheless, the encampments, all of them, are also part of the journey. Even when we stop in undesirable places, where we “anger G-d” by our behavior – our assimilation or imitation of the nations – we are still on the journey, still traveling toward the land of Israel.

The descent into exile is part of the process of Redemption.

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Of course, at the actual encampment of “*kivros ha’ta’avah*,” the Jewish people angered G-d with their demand for meat. Before they buried their desire, it pushed them to challenge Moses and test G-d. From this we see that even negative things, acts that violate G-d’s Will, are still part of the journey. They, too, contain holiness and lead to the ultimate goal, entrance to the land of Israel.

In general, we can distinguish between “going” – the journeys – and “standing” – the encampments. “Standing” means remaining in the same place. Even when there is advancement, if we are still connected to where we were, we haven’t really moved forward. For example, one may be a beginning, intermediate or advanced student. Clearly, an “advanced” student is at a higher level than a “beginning” student. But he is still a student; going from “beginner” to “advanced” isn’t really moving forward. But when the student becomes a rabbi or teacher, he is in a completely new state. He has “journeyed forth,” going into a status unrelated to his previous situation. This is why the Torah says, “these are the journeys,” plural, because a Jew must constantly be moving forward. A Jew must always be going higher, and not just from one level to another in the same place; a Jew must always be on a journey to a totally new stage, one without resemblance or comparison to the previous position.

Of course, there is a deeper implication, one relevant for our current situation and efforts to bring Moshiach. The statement “These are the journeys” means both going forth and leaving behind. That is, the journey to a new stage of existence, a transformed state, a more elevated level, requires that we uproot ourselves from where we were. We must leave behind completely our former circumstances and situation.

The Torah says, “These are the journeys of the children of Israel when they left Egypt.” As the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad, points out, the Jewish people left Egypt as soon as they stepped

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by
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Masai

DELAYS IN THE JOURNEY

Why is the Torah portion called “journeys” when most of the time in the desert they didn’t move? We learn that even “encampments,” interruptions or obstacles, are part of the journey. The forty-two “journeys” in the wilderness parallel those of the Jewish people. One can advance, reach a higher level, without going forth. To journey, or go forth, means to travel to a completely new state of existence. Similarly, the encampments – the sojourns of the children of Israel among the various nations – are a descent into greater exile. Delays, even in friendly countries, impede the fulfillment of our true goal, transforming the world into a dwelling place for G-dliness. Nevertheless, the “encampments” are also part of the journey. Our descent into exile will lead to an ascent into Redemption. Therefore, in our darkest moments, we must increase light and joy, that is, Torah and mitzvot. Moshiach’s delay is an “encampment” that should not discourage or depress us.

This week’s Torah reading, the last in the book of *Bamidbar* (Numbers), begins with the verse: “These are the journeys of the children of Israel when they left the land of Egypt.” The Torah then enumerates all the encampments of the Jewish people throughout their travels in the wilderness. This raises an important question about the Torah’s choice of words. Since it enumerates the encampments, it should have said, “These are the encampments of the children of Israel.” Why does it say, “These are the journeys”? We are given a list of the Jewish people’s campsites, not told about their travels.

The question is more than semantics. The narrative of the Torah is the paradigm for all Jewish history. What happened to that generation – the Exodus, the giving of the Torah, the forty years in the desert, and the entrance to Israel – happens in all ages and

to every individual. Especially in our own day, as we stand on the threshold of the final Redemption, the events of that time will be relived.

So, a more logical phrasing would have been, “These are the encampments of the children of Israel,” especially since most of the time they weren’t traveling anyway. So when the Torah tells us, “These are the journeys,” it indicates something about the whole process. What was the purpose of both the travels and encampments in the wilderness? What was the entire process intended to accomplish? Clearly the intent was to reach the land of Israel. But an encampment is a resting place, the end of a journey, or a particular phase of a journey. We might think that when the Jewish people stopped, they had reached their goal, or if they traveled again afterwards, at least one of their goals. When the Torah says, “These are the journeys,” it tells us that each stage – the encampments and the traveling – are part of a greater whole. In and of itself, coming to a particular resting place accomplishes nothing, and might even be a hindrance. Only as part of the ultimate goal, reaching the land of Israel, does a particular encampment or journey have significance.

But if this is the case, the Torah should have said, “This is the journey,” not “These are the journeys.” If it’s all one process, why does the Torah talk about “journeys,” in the plural?

The Baal Shem Tov explains that the forty-two “journeys” of the Jewish people correspond to stages in the life of the individual Jew. The names of the stages indicate aspects or levels of personal growth. For example, for a while the Jewish people encamped at “*kivros ha’ta’avah*,” literally, the burial of desire. True wisdom leads to a great attachment to G-d. When wisdom overrules the emotions, the individual deeply and fully attaches himself to G-d. As a result, he has in effect buried his desire for material gain or pleasure. For this reason, the Jewish people camped at “*kivros ha’ta’avah*.”