

Maasei

Hearing voices and hitting home runs

These are the travels of the Jewish people.

Bamidbar 33:1

The places where the Jewish people encamped are called their “travels.” Rashi, elsewhere in his commentary to the Torah,⁹⁰ wonders why this is. He explains that since the Jewish people always departed on their journeys from the locations where they were encamped, those encampments *were*, in fact, their “travels.” In other words, since they left from there, it was also a part of their travels. But this approach, while reasonable, seems a bit non-fulfilling. The Torah, in listing the places where the Jewish people lived, decides to refer to those places as their travels, and though we now understand how that is technically a valid name for them, we still must wonder why the Torah chose this verbiage.

“Hashem spoke to Avraham: ‘Go for yourself, away from your land, your birthplace and your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.’”⁹¹ Sfas Emes⁹² teaches something remarkable. He brings a *Zohar* telling us that each day, a heavenly voice calls out and tells mankind to leave their comfort zone, just as Avraham was told to. Avraham, says the Sfas Emes, was not the only one who was told to leave his home. Everyone in the world was being told that. Avraham was merely the very first person to listen to that voice. We are all being spoken to. The Avrahams among us are those who listen carefully, and hear Hashem.

The message here is a very important one. We are all being told to move. Change, grow. What can seem an impossible task to a person at one stage can, in fact, be truly manageable once he reaches the next stage. A fellow who thinks that merely learning how to pray in Hebrew will be insurmountable needs to begin by simply learning the Aleph Bet. And so does the person who can not conceive of knowing all of *shas*. As we break through one barrier in life, we are to know that a heavenly voice demands of us each day – do not sit still. This picture of reality that you have is not all that there is. Leave and search for something more. You will keep seeing more. That land that you are being taken to, the “land that I will show you,” is in fact called “The Land That I Will Show You.”⁹³ The place that Avraham would travel to would be one where there would always be more to see, and more to accomplish. If a person has learned one part of Torah, he must learn another one. He cannot simply encamp where he is. If he

90 Shemos 40:38

91 Bereishis 12:1

92 *Sfas Emes* to Lech Lecha 632, s.v. *Ramban*.

93 *Mei Hashiloach*, Lech Lecha

were to become a Rosh Yeshiva, then it may now be time to become an author. Believing that things as we see them at this moment are the entire picture of reality is a great danger. Avraham came to the world to begin teaching humanity that we have to keep treating our accomplishments only as the stepping stones to start our new ones.

A person's preconceptions define a great deal about him. If a person cannot conceive of watching less than an hour of television a day, he likely will not do it. But when a person is ready to "leave where he is," if he can learn to let go of the notions that he has collected and travel to a new place, he will discover that things are possible that he never imagined. Often, the greatest influence that one friend can have on another is by simply showing another person that "someone just like you can, in fact, keep Shabbos, or learn Torah." This is one of the most powerful ways that we have of influencing others, for when they can see that something is possible, then there can be a shift of framework for that person, and they can grow.

Our job is to take big steps. Rabbi Aaron Kaufman is fond of explaining that hitting one's first home run in a baseball game is a great accomplishment. But perhaps the best part of it is that now you know that you can hit one. Even if the fellow doesn't make contact with the ball in his next several tries, he now knows that it is possible for him to achieve success. The stops that the Jews made were nothing more than places from which to travel onward. The great accomplishments that you may have, great as they are, are most valuable as stepping stones for you to climb to even another level. That heavenly voice demands it, and your heart will hear that voice if you just listen closely.