



## Enjoy life's journeys

RABBI RAPHAEL LANDESMAN  
Parsha Masei, Numbers 30:2-36:13

The most profound insights can be encapsulated in very small packages. A crime can be solved on the basis of a tiny piece of evidence, a lie exposed on the overhearing of a chance comment, a frustratingly elusive concept grasped because of a small nuance found in the explanation. The Torah specializes in these nuggets of illumination, often encasing a wealth of understanding in an extra word or a twist of phrase.

At the beginning of Parsha Masei, the Torah enumerates the travels of the children of Israel during their 40 years in the desert. The verse states, "And Moses wrote the departures for their (the children of Israel) journeys on the word of God, and these are the journeys of their departures." This seems a bit redundant - why state twice that the Torah is about to list the places the Israelites visited? And why write that statement differently the second time, as "the journeys of their departures," as opposed to "the departures for their journeys"? For that matter, why not just write "journeys" or "departures" alone? The questions may seem picky and trivial, but they are necessary if we are to unlock the Torah's secrets.

The Malbim explains that there are two different reasons one travels - in order to get to where one needs to go, and in order to leave where one no longer wishes to be. The phrase "departures for their journeys" implies that the Jews in the desert were traveling to get to their destination - the Land of Israel. "Journeys of their departures" implies the opposite - that the Jews were traveling to escape their previous encampment, and that the point was the departure from where they had been. The Malbim explains that God intended primarily for the Jews' travels to be toward various destinations and experiences - the splitting of the Red Sea with all of its miracles, the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and ultimately the goal of reaching the Land of Israel.

The Jews, having just stopped being slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, were focused on putting as much distance between themselves and the Egyptians as possible. They did not necessarily know or appreciate all that God had in store for them, and therefore when the trip became too difficult, they clamored to return to Egypt, saying that maybe life there had not been so bad after all.

It is often a challenge to us to realize why we are on the move. We sometimes think that we are trying to get somewhere better, that we are making a life-change in order to upgrade our position, when in reality we are using the "need for a change" as an excuse to avoid a tough situation, an increase in responsibility at work or the demands of marriage and family.

And sometimes, we need to run away, not really knowing where we are going, but understanding that where we are now is not tolerable. We think in those situations that the point is the journey away from our previous place. But God often shows us that His plan all along was really to get us to somewhere totally different from where we have been, so that we can start anew in an environment that develops us in a way that would have been impossible in the old setting. Our "journey of our departure" becomes a "departure of our journey."

I would never have thought that I would end up living in Phoenix - with my New York and Jerusalem upbringing, Phoenix was the other end of the world. But here I and my family are, and here we have been for five years. I have experienced and learned things that I never would have in the places that I thought I would inhabit. God has His plans; we just need to accept and trust them, as we embark on our life's journeys.

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