Jewish Tribune – Shemos

**Living Baderech**

The car is full; suitcases, bags, food, more food and pretty much anything we might need for our summer holiday. We have a tradition in family Golker that as we embark on our long car journey, we stop off at Grodz or one of the local eateries and buy an ice coffee or something else, at the outset of the journey.

Why? Well, partly because my wife and I like ice coffee, but more importantly because we want to convey the message to ourselves and our kids that the holiday begins from when we leave. The journey is part of the holiday.

Not only does this make for a better and happier drive, but it teaches an important life lesson. A lesson that we see Moshe Rabbeinu exhibit in this week’s sedrah.

While fleeing from Egypt, Moshe made his way through the remote desert toward Midyan. And then Moshe Rabbeinu sees a strange sight, a bush ablaze in the middle of the desert and yet the bush is not being consumed.

וַיַּרְא ה' כִּי סָר לִרְאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹקִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסְּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי

And Hashem saw that he had turned to see, and G-d called to him from within the thorn bush and said “Moshe, Moshe!” And he said, “Here I am”. (Shemos 3,4)

Rabbi Judah Mischel, in his sefer Baderech (p373), cites the great Mashgiach of Mir and later Ponevezh, Rav Yechezkel Levenstein. The Mashgiach asks: “Wouldn’t anyone turn to look and see such an uncommon, extraordinary sight? How could someone pass a bush ablaze in the middle of the desert, not being consumed, and not notice?”

The answer is that if we are not present in all our ways, we might just miss burning bushes. As Rabbi Mischel puts it: “Living ba’derech and cultivating a growth mindset orients us toward enjoying the sights, sounds and opportunities along the way. Instead of ‘Are we there yet?’ one might hear himself saying, ‘What an amazing view!’”

סָר לִרְאוֹת – Moshe turning aside to see is not just a description of what occurred but an indication of the type of person that Moshe Rabbeinu was. Someone who stopped to notice, someone who had a growth mindset, who saw and internalised the Divine message in the journey and in whatever was occurring.

Rav Mischel tells an anecdote about Rav Yitzchak Hutner, the legendary Rosh Yeshiva of Chaim Berlin. Rav Hutner was once travelling the subway in New York, accompanied by a talmid. As they were leaving, the student asked his Rebbi if he’d like to take a sefer to learn on the way. Rav Hutner, known for his sharp witticism, admonished his talmid, “One doesn’t need to be learning from a sefer to fill their time meaningfully.” He bemoaned the lost art of being “misbonein”, reflecting, simply thinking while on the way.

Some years ago, I went to a chupa and had a small sefer with me. There is often much downtime at a chupa and I planned on snatching some minutes to learn before the chupa actually began. A visiting Rosh Yeshiva happened to be there, a person who I knew quite well. After he greeted me with a “sholom aleichem”, he swiftly chastised me for bringing a sefer with me. “Have you really got nothing to think about?” he asked.

It dawned on me some time later, that this Rosh Yeshiva is a proud talmid of Rav Hutner. No doubt, he was simply sharing his mentor’s viewpoint with me.

I suppose it is confusing. There is definitely room for utilising snatched moments to learn. We have all heard the stories of the “5-minute siyumim”, with people learning a few lines here and there which quickly add up, but Rav Hutner’s point is that being misbonein and reflecting in our daily lives is important and a somewhat diminishing art.

We can walk the streets of life and use the time productively, not just to reflect and think about various matters but also to be attuned to burning bushes on the way. To be misbonein and consider the messages, the callings and the learning.

Rav Mischel concludes his piece with a thought of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch. The Aron Kodesh containing the Luchos, was carried on two poles placed through two sets of rings. Even when the Aron was not in transit, the poles remained within the rings. Rav Hirsch explains that the poles represent Torah, because Torah is “ready at all times to accompany the people of Israel wherever their G-d may lead them.” (Collected Writings volume 3)

Even while the poles and Aron are resting in their permanent place in the Beis Hamikdash, the Ribbono shel Olam wants us to be aware that anywhere our path takes us, Torah, halacha, is right there to guide us, baderech, on the road, as much as at home.

And it sometimes takes a burning bush, or at least an ice coffee to help us realise that journeys are important.

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