

Pulse OF Emunah

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life

LESSONS

CHILDREN WATCHING

Reproduced from "Living Kiddush Hashem" by Rabbi Shraga Freedman, with permission of ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l was once in a doctor's waiting room, along with a five-year-old non-Jewish boy. While the *gadol* could have spent time learning, he chose to play catch with the little boy instead. He explained "I wanted him to have positive memories of an elderly bearded Jew" (Rabbi Yonasan Rosenblum, the Jewish Observer, January 2001).

When I heard this, I decided I would try to emulate Rav Yaakov. Although my children do not play with their non-Jewish neighbors, we occasionally see children watching us when we play ball in a public park.

Sometimes, it is clear that an observing non-Jewish boy wishes to join the game. I will invite him to do so, explaining to my children that we are making a *kiddush Hashem*. I will even go so far as to comment to the child that we are Jewish, and to ask him, "Aren't Jews nice?"

This is not the only example. There are many acts of kindness that can make a positive impression on the children we encounter. If we see a child who needs help crossing a street, or is lost and crying, or is struggling with a heavy package, we can make a tremendous impact by just bending down and asking how we can help.

Certainly a child who receives help from a Jew at a time of crisis will always be affected by that show of kindness. But even the smallest display of compassion, under the most mundane circumstances, can have far-reaching effects.

As we pursue our mission of *kiddush Hashem*, remember that the children of the world may be watching. 



gem

OF THE WEEK

MEMORIES FOR THE FUTURE

Based on the commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.

At the beginning of the 33rd *perek*, the Torah recounts the journeys and stopovers of the Yidden throughout the *midbar*. These travels were filled with personal milestones worthy of remembrance by the families and descendants directly affected by them. However, because these experiences belonged to specific tribes rather than the community at large, they are omitted from the written Torah, which addresses the nation as a whole. Instead, those memories were preserved via oral tradition; this written list simply serves as a set of geographic signposts to use as a device to remember that tradition.

One can only imagine how many traces of our ancestors' wanderings were preserved in these desert locations. They offered profound opportunities for future generations to visit the sites where Hashem revealed Himself through wondrous, direct guidance. By retracing these steps, descendants could witness the authenticity of Hashem's presence on earth.

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powerful
PRAYER



V'LAMALSHINIM:
FIGHTING FALSEHOOD

This *bracha* was not in the original *Shemoneh Esrei* composed by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*—it was added much later, in the days of Rabban Gamliel. During that era, the early Christians would slander the Jews to their Roman rulers and try to recruit Jews to their invented religion. The *chachamim* tell us that while murder ends a life in this world, to cause someone to sin takes his life in the next. When Rabban Gamliel saw this danger, he and his *beis din* added this *bracha* to *Shemoneh Esrei*. It is a request to destroy the *minim*, who spread lies about the Torah and the Jewish people. 

Adapted from Biur Tefillah (Ani Maamin Foundation)

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REPEATING MISTAKES OF OLD

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

With two weeks left till Tisha B'Av, let us focus on one of the many lessons that we need to learn from the *churban*. The Torah commands us, "Remember the days of old!" We need to be inspired by the great deeds of old, but never allow ourselves to repeat the catastrophic mistakes of the past. What didn't work then will almost certainly not work now. What brought on disaster then will surely have the same effect now. Sadly enough, old mistakes have been repeated over and over again.

The kingdom of Yehuda, which began with Dovid Hamelech, lasted over four hundred fifty years. Some of the kings were great *tzadikim* and others were actually terrible *reshaim*. The very last king before the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash was Tzidkiyahu. He was actually a *tzadik gamur*, but he allowed himself to repeat errors that had been done numerous times before his reign. He hoped to be victorious by making foreign alliances, and he didn't listen to the *nevi'im*. There were three sins, that caused the *pasuk* to say, "He did what was evil in Hashem's eyes."

The *nevi'im* had commanded repeatedly in the name of Hashem that all the nations must submit to Nevuchadnetzar. Everyone must accept the yoke of his rule. Nevuchadnetzar put Tzidkiyahu on the throne, and made him swear that he would never rebel against him. Indeed, Tzidkiyahu swore, but had no intention of keeping that oath. Of course he nullified his oath before Sanhedrin, but an oath made as a promise to someone can only be nullified in front of and with the permission of that person. Just as soon as he parted from Nevuchadnetzar, he began making alliances with the other nations already under Nevuchadnetzar's rule. In addition to the *aveira* of *shvuas sheker*, it was a horrific *chilul* Hashem that someone who had sworn on a *Sefer Torah* should break his oath. Tzidkiyahu was so bent on being released from Nevuchadnetzar's clutches, that he put his trust in allies rather than listening to the *nevi'im*.

His second mistake was that he did not rebuke the people for their sins. He could have caused a *teshuva* revival such as his ancestor Chizkiyahu and his father Yoshiyahu had done. Therefore he was blamed for all the sins of the people, although he had not transgressed them personally.

His third mistake was that he refused to listen to when Yirmiyahu told him in the name of Hashem that he should surrender to Nevuchadnetzar. Even at the last moment, had he done so, his life would have been spared and Yerushalayim would not have been destroyed. The *novi* told him that if he refuses to listen, he would be personally responsible for the destruction. He could not overcome his desire for victory, and the *churban* took place, just as the *nevi'im* had predicted.

To be continued.....

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The sheer barrenness of this environment—a wilderness so vast that a typical caravan must meticulously ration its resources just to survive—stands as a physical testament to a miracle. It was only through continuous Divine intervention that an entire nation of at least two and a half million souls survived here for forty years. The landscape itself provides undeniable proof of the supernatural foundation of Israel's establishment.

In verse two, when introducing these travels, the Torah states: "Moshe recorded their decampments for their journeys at the command of Hashem, and these are their journeys for their decampments." Why does the text reverse the word order, placing "decampments" first when discussing Hashem's command, but leading with "journeys" when speaking of the people? This variation is deeply significant. Hashem viewed their movements as a purposeful removal from their current state so that they could continue to grow spiritually. For Hashem, breaking camp was a necessary step in order to reach a goal.

Whenever He ordered them to move, His intention was for them to absorb a new life lesson, leading them to an environment perfectly suited for that objective. Each transition made progress possible; Am Yisroel's decampment was designed specifically to make these journeys, and subsequent growth, achievable. To the people, however, it was the exact opposite. Wherever they stayed, they felt a sense of dissatisfaction and desired only to escape.

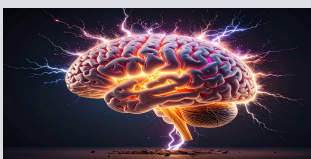
When the time arrived to move, the mere act of breaking camp and leaving became their primary goal. They focused entirely on where they were leaving, rather than where they were going. For the generation of the midbar, their travels were defined not by the destination, but by a constant urge to move on.

This serves as a timeless lesson for our own life journeys: we must ensure that our movements are driven by a desire to achieve a higher purpose, rather than a restless urge to simply escape our present circumstances.



wonder WORLD

STRENGTH OF THE MIND



Where do you go when you can't leave?

The human brain can track exactly what happens when we make life transitions. Research shows that our brains react completely differently depending on our underlying motivation. When a person operates out of avoidance motivation—their only goal is to escape a negative situation—the brain activates its threat-detection center, the amygdala.

This triggers a steady release of cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone, which causes chronic anxiety and mental fatigue over time. By contrast, when a person switches to approach motivation—focusing entirely on reaching a meaningful destination—the brain shifts its activity to the left prefrontal cortex, the area responsible for problem-solving and planning. This shift triggers a healthy release of dopamine, the chemical reward system that gives us energy and satisfaction. Because the brain's physical wiring requires a clear objective to transition out of stress mode, true mental stamina is biologically impossible when we focus only on where we are leaving rather than where we are going.