



Journeys of the Jews

Taking a look at Jewish history, we notice that we have been exiled all over the world. Even with our small population today, we find Jews in places we wouldn't expect them to be. We have been in some countries longer than others. What determines which countries we will be in and for how long?

The perfect world was shattered with the sin of Adam. This sin caused sparks of kedusha to be scattered all over the world. It is now our task to bring these sparks back to their rectification. When one is standing on a roof and wants to pick up an object from the ground, he needs to go down to pick it up. Likewise, we too need to descend to this world to rectify the scattered sparks of kedusha. This idea is shown in וקרב פזורינו... draw our scattered ones near... (Mussaf of Yom Tov)

All that we possess—material belongings, food, and so on—have a specific relation with our neshama. The apple we decide to eat can only get its rectification through us. Hashem arranges for us to select a specific apple. When we eat it, we now have energy for avodas Hashem, which gives the apple its rectification. The same applies to clothes, utensils, and everything else that we use. When these items assist in avodas Hashem through our using them, they receive rectification. The Meor Einayim (Matos) writes from the Baal Shem Tov that even if a non-Jew ate from food that has a spark of kedusha in it and uses the energy from that food to help a Jew, it becomes elevated.

With this, we can better comprehend why Hashem created us with a need to eat and drink, as in this way our food gets its rectification (On the other hand, foods that we are forbidden to eat get their elevation by our abstaining from them [Ohr Gedalyahu, Moadim, Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan, 1]). An allusion to this is found in ותעטר רעבים גם (Tehillim 107:5). As the Baal Shem Tov explains, when we are hungry or thirsty, it is because our soul is in the food or drink (Nesivos Shalom, Vayigash). This gives us insight into why some people like certain foods while others dislike them. As the foods that one desires are the ones that need rectification through him. Similarly, when one uses medicine, he elevates the sparks of

kedusha that are in it. That is why one takes medicine to be healed.

In a similar vein, we can explain why an object may get lost or given to another person. Once an object has been rectified by its owner, it is now time for it to move on to someone else who is connected to the remaining sparks left so it can get the next rectification it needs (Keser Shem Tov, end of volume 1).

Wherever we travel in life, we must realise that we are directed from Hashem, as it says על פי ה' יחנו, ועל פי ה' יסעו, we encamp and journey according to the word of Hashem (Bamidbar 9:23). When one walks to the beis midrash, the ground he walks on is being rectified. It is all מה מצעדי גבר מנו, by Hashem are a man's footsteps established (Tehillim, 37:23), as all that happens at each specific time is Divinely directed. The next time we see a new road, we can think of its purpose—for example, to have cars loaded with people heading to learn Torah.

All that happens—along with its timing and where it takes place—is provisionally designed, as it says כיה' עיני משטותו בכל הארץ, Hashem's eyes roam throughout the land (Divrei Hayamim 2 16:9). This includes the smallest details, such as where a leaf falls, which leaf falls and which leaf will be trampled on.

R' Tzvi of Zidichov, author of the Ateres Tzvi, was traveling on the road with his students, when they saw a wagon loaded with straw. Suddenly some fell out. He told his students that it was provisionally divined which ones would fall, how they would fall and which area it would fall in. Back then, the villagers making bricks needed straw for the mud of the bricks. What would go into which bricks and into which wall they would be put was according to Divine providence. It was dependent according to the holy spark that was in it and which people were connected to the sparks that were in these bricks and mud (Shomer Emunim, Maamar Hashgacha Pratis, Chapter 16).

When we were exiled to Galus Edom, the Shechina went with us. A deeper meaning is that when one acts like Edom (sinfully), he degrades and draws down to Edom the Divine spark

(Tanya, chapter 17). He then needs to do a good act to elevate them. When a tzadik performs a good act after he stumbled in sin, he raises the fragments of kedusha that he had caused to fall. However, when the wicked do teshuva, they raise those fragments in a way that tzadikim, who never went down that deep, can not. We also see this in the physical world, as the deeper an object falls, the lower one must descend to pick it up. Based on this, we can grasp a profound meaning in מקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין, צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין, in the place where baalai teshuva stand, the completely righteous don't stand (Brachos 34b).

During the course of Galus, we have been all over the world. The reason for this is to gather the sparks of kedusha—in food, people, the ground, and so on. Accordingly, the Gemara (Pesachim 87b) says that Jews are exiled among the nations in order that converts will be added onto them (Pri Tzadik, Masei, 4). The 42 encampments in Parshas Masei were all necessary, since at each encampment, there was that which needed rectification (Nesivos Shalom, Masei).

In light of this, we can grasp why we have been in various places for different amounts of time throughout Galus. When we accomplished the rectification that was necessary in that specific place, there was no purpose for us to be there any longer. As a result, we were ready to move on to the next place.

One year, two chassidim set out to travel to the Baal Shem Tov for the Yamim Noraim. However, circumstances caused them to spend Rosh Hashana in an isolated location devoid of any Jews. Although they had a shofar with them, the spirit of Rosh Hashana seemed to be lacking. When they reached the Baal Shem Tov after Yom Tov, they expressed their disappointment at not having had the opportunity to spend Yom Tov with him, especially after all the time and money they spent on traveling. He explained that in every location in the world there are sparks of kedusha which need to be elevated. He told them that through their performing the mitzva of shofar in the place they stayed for Rosh Hashana, they elevated the sparks of kedusha there.

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