

# Three Days before Aliyah

From the time of Avraham Avinu, the act of moving to Eretz Yisrael has been one that is fraught with challenges. An important perspective on the challenges involved comes from the eighth chapter of Sefer Ezra, in which Ezra prepares to bring a large group of exiles from Bavel back to Eretz Yisrael.

ואקבצם אל הנהר הבא אל אהוא ונחנה שם ימים שלשה ואבינה בעם ובכהנים ומבני לוי לא מצאתי שם. עזרא ה: טו

*I assembled them at the flowing river, at the Ahava, and we encamped there three days, and I scrutinized the people and the kohanim, but I could find no Levites there.*

## Ezra 8: 15

Ezra was concerned that the group moving to Eretz Yisrael should also include Leviim, and after noticing their absence, he recruited two families of Leviim to come along with him. But before that, Ezra camped on the outskirts of Bavel for three days. Why did he do so and what can we learn from this?

The Gemara in *Eruvin* gives one explanation for the three-day delay.

אמר רבי אלעזר הבא מן הדרך אל יתפלל שלשה ימים שנאמר ואקבצם אל הנהר הבא אל אהוא ונחנה שם ימים שלשה ... עירובין ס"ה.

*Rabbi Elazar said: After arriving from traveling, one should not pray for three days, as it says "And I assembled them at the flowing river, at the Ahava..."*

## Eruvin 65a



## Rabbi Azriel Rosner

Rosh Midrasha, Tiferet

Rashi explains that for the first three days after traveling, one's mind is unsettled because of the difficulties of the road, and therefore, Rabbi Elazar assumes that one does not have the *kavana* (intent) necessary to daven. According to this reading, Ezra waited three days because he apparently had already traveled a while to get to the Ahava, and he wanted his mind to be clear before doing a full accounting of the lineage of his followers.

This is an important statement about the necessity of *kavana* during davening — that it is so central that without it, Rabbi Elazar held that one should not daven. Nowadays though, based on the Rashba in *Eruvin*, ad loc., we assume that we do not have adequate *kavana* in any situation, and therefore do not cancel davening after a journey.

A different perspective on the three-day break is found in *Bereishit Raba* on *Parashat Vayera*:

כתיב יחינו מיומיים ביום השלישי יקימנו ונחיה לפניו. ביום השלישי של שבטים כתיב ויאמר אליהם יוסף ביום שלישי ביום שלישי של מתן תורה ויהי ביום השלישי בהיות הבקת ביום השלישי של מרגלים שנאמר ונחבתם שמה שלשת ימים. ביום שלישי של יונה ויהי יונה במעי הדג שלשה ימים. ביום שלישי של עולי גולה ונחנה שם ימים שלשה. בראשית רבה. פרשת וירא. פרשה נו

*It is written, After two days He will revive us, on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His presence. E.g. on the third day of the tribal ancestors: And Joseph said unto them the third day: This do, and live; on the third day of Revelation: And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning; on the third day of the spies: And hide yourselves there three days; on the third day of Jonah: And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights; on the third day of those returning from the Exile: And we abode there three days.*

## Bereishit Rabbah Vayera 56 (Soncino Translation)

The midrash links together five episodes from Tanach that all happened after a three-day delay. According to the commentators on the midrash, the common denominator between the various events is that G-d would not allow tzadikim to suffer for more than three days. Therefore, for example, the spies who were being chased by the people of Yericho only had to hide for three days, and Yona only remained in the fish's belly for three days.

Applying that to Sefer Ezra, the midrash is then explaining that the three days on the banks of the Ahava were days of distress from which G-d saved them. It is unclear from the verses what that distress was. In his

commentary on *Bereishit Raba*, Rav Zev Volf Einhorn suggests that the distress was their fear of the upcoming journey to Eretz Yisrael, and their salvation was a promise from G-d that they would be safe.

In a different vein, the *Eitz Yosef* on the midrash writes that the distress of Bnei Yisrael on the banks of the Ahava was due to the lack of *yishuv hadaat* (tranquility) at this time, which rendered them unable to discern the absence of Leviim among them. According to this explanation, the salvation was the return of their *yishuv hadaat* after three days had passed.

But perhaps we can suggest another meaning for these three days, based on the paradigm of Matan Torah. In Sefer Shmot, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells Moshe about the upcoming event on Har Sinai, it is clear from the psukim that the three days preceding Matan Torah are to be seen primarily as days of preparation for that awe-inspiring religious event.

לך אל העם וקדשתם היום ומחר וכבסו שמלתם. והיו נכנים ליום השלישי כי ביום השלישי ירד ה' לעיני כל העם על הר סיני. שמות יט: י - יא

*Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow and they shall wash their clothes. Let them be prepared for the third day, because on the third day G-d will descend in the sight of the entire people on Har Sinai.*

**Shmot 19: 10 – 11**

Similarly, at the beginning of Sefer Yehoshua, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to prepare for three days before they cross the Yarden.

הכינו לכם צדה כי בעוד שלשת ימים אתם עברים את הירדן הזה לבוא לרשת את הארץ אשר ה' א-לקיכם נתן לכם לרשתה. יהושע א: יא

*Prepare provisions for yourselves because in another three days, you will be crossing this Yarden to come to take possession of the land that G-d is giving you to inherit.*

**Yehoshua 1: 11**

Three days can be interpreted as a standard time for preparation for a monumental religious event — in the above cases, Matan Torah and the crossing of the Yarden into Eretz Yisrael. Perhaps similarly, the three days of encampment in Bavel had an additional level of significance. Ezra had his followers wait for three days because the journey to Eretz Yisrael was so important that a preparatory period was in order.

But if so, then Ezra is making an essential but subtle statement. The three days mandated here do not directly precede the entry into Eretz Yisrael as in Sefer Yehoshua. Instead, the Jews in the time of Ezra waited three days before they even began their journey. This would indicate that Ezra did not just view living in Eretz Yisrael as an act of religious significance; the journey from Bavel toward Eretz Yisrael was itself meaningful. The travel back to Eretz Yisrael was not just a means to an end, a way to get back to living in Eretz Yisrael — the journey was momentous in and of itself.

This concept of the religious significance of the journey can be confirmed by the continuation of the perek, which explains why Ezra was especially nervous at this time:

כי בשתי לשאול מן המלך חיל ופרשים לעזרנו מאויב בדרך כי אמרנו למלך לאמר יד אלקינו על כל מבקשיו לטובה ועזו ואפו על כל עזביו. עזרא ח: כב

*For I was embarrassed to request troops and horsemen of the king to assist us*

*against an adversary along the way, since we had told the king that the hand of G-d is benevolent for all who seek Him, and His might and anger befall all who forsake Him.*

**Ezra 8: 22**

The Malbim writes that “even though it is not proper to rely on a miracle ... and they should have requested an army escort from the king, they were unable to do so since they had already said that they are accompanied by the providence of G-d in a miraculous way.” Ezra had already told the Persian king that this journey would be safe, protected by G-d, and therefore Ezra could not afterward make a request that would contradict his claim.

Again, we see that the success of the journey back to Eretz Yisrael was not just a practical matter, not just a means to an end. It would prove to the Persian king — and to themselves — that Ezra’s claim of G-d’s watchfulness over their mission was indeed correct. Their safe arrival would be a statement that the return to Eretz Yisrael during this time period was indeed being guided and assisted by G-d.

In our time, too, we should view the preparation for aliyah in the same way. Not only is living in Eretz Yisrael an important religious act, but even the preparations, even the travel, have tremendous significance. Ezra’s three days of solemn preparation teach us that every step we take in the right direction, every step we take back to Eretz Yisrael, is itself an independent mitzvah.