I Want it Now!

by

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

*Who is the wise person? He who sees the future.*

- Talmud

“Hashem said to Avram, ‘Go for yourself from your land...to the land that I will show you...’” (*Bereishit* 12:1) When God sends Avram to the land that “… I will show you…” who among us would have faulted Avram for asking, “What land? What path should I take?” Who among us would have taken issue if he had wanted to know, “When shall I arrive?”

If any one of us received such an instruction, we would more likely ask, “What should I pack?” than simply obey God’s command.

But Avram asked for and received no instruction. Ramban observes that Avram was *never* told of his ultimate destination, and so he wandered from place to place, from here to there until he arrived in *Eretz Canaan*, when God revealed Himself to him and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” (12:7) Only then was the original command to, “…go to the land I will show you…” fulfilled.

Our teachers and sages correctly look to Avram’s remarkable faith in leaving behind the land of his forebears; in simply “picking up” and following God’s command. However, the more “human” among us read this narrative and an obvious question rises within us, *Why*? Why didn’t God simply tell Avram where to go? Why wasn’t his ultimate destination revealed from the start? After all, if a father roused his children and told them, “Get in the car! I’m taking you someplace special!” wouldn’t we wonder why he didn’t, from the outset, let them know they were going to Disneyworld? Or if they were going to the beach, tell them so they could be sure to pack sunscreen? Or skiing, to bring their skis?

Why didn’t God just tell Avram where he was going?

Rashi, based on *Bereishit Rabah*, suggests that God did not reveal the final destination for two reasons. The first, to make the land more beloved in Avraham’s eyes. The second, and perhaps more powerful reason, was to reward Avram for every step he would take along the path to his destination.

In a profound way, the second reason leads to the first; when one learns from the journey, arriving at the destination is a richer and more rewarding experience.

We are an impatient creature.We are beset and bedeviled by urges and wants. We want things *now*! Comfort and satisfaction are our most immediate desires. Wasn’t this the truth about our natures the very dynamic that facilitated Jacob’s “stealing” the birthright from Esau? He tricked him when he was hungry, when his urges drove him to the “bargaining table”. Isn’t that our understanding? If so, Jacob’s ruse raises a troubling question, why would he take what seems to be such unfair advantage of his brother?

If Esau was really so hungry, perhaps even starving, then how could Jacob have tricked him? Doesn’t Jewish law make clear that a man cannot be bound by agreements made under the threat death?

Jacob, we learn from the rabbis, first gave his brother bread, thereby relieving the true desperation of Esau’s hunger. And it was only then that he gave him the stew which, by accepting, Esau, sealed the deal.

Esau’s decision, while no longer “life and death” was driven by his primal desire. He wanted food. Now. He wanted satisfaction. Now.

He wanted it. Now.

The Steipler Gaon in his *Bircas Peretz* refers to the same Midrash as Rashi in commenting on God’s call to Avram when he observes that a thing becomes more valuable and beloved when you must *work* for it. An object, a goal, a dream is all the more meaningful when its realization and fulfillment demands energy and time. The more time and effort, the greater the value. On the other hand, when something is gained easily – even something of objective value – it is not truly valued or cherished. It is, in fact, diminished.

*That* is the first lesson God wanted to impart to Avram and, ultimately, to all his children – Go! Go on a journey. Do not rely on “Maps” or “waze”. Let the journey itself reveal its meaning and uncover its own rewards. Don’t focus on the distant destination. Focus on the road, the path, the gifts you will undoubtedly discover along the way.

It was the journey itself which imbued Avram his deep love for the land when he finally arrived. For when he arrived, he *knew* what it meant to actually get there. He had appreciated each step, each adventure, each moment of challenge and kindness. As a result, the land was even more beautiful; received even more gratefully.

We are indeed an “Esau generation”. We demand instant gratification in *everything*. We do not bake, we throw dough and yeast and water into bread makers, so we can wake up to the smell of baked bread. We don’t cook, simmering sauces with love and care. No, we microwave instant dinners. We cannot even wait for instant downloads on our phones or tablets! We demand 4G! 5G! Infinity G! Just so we can do everything, see everything, *now*!

We would do well to consider the Stepler Gaon’s insight. We want everything so immediately that we leave no room to appreciate the “journey” that allowed the thing we demand to come into being. As a result, we are no sooner “gratified” than boredom sets in. As quickly as boredom sets in we want something else, something new and we want it *now,* so we get something new and “better” and then the boredom sets in, so we want something new and we want it *now*…and the cycle continues. Boredom. Gratification. Boredom. There is no satisfaction. No delight. No beloved appreciation. Just the ever-diminishing satiation of an addict before the need for the next fix drives him forward. And, lest the student of Torah feel “high and mighty” in judgment of secular society’s obvious shortcomings when it comes to the demand for instant gratification, he would do well to consider that the Steipler argues the *very same is true* for the student of Torah. Toil (amala she Torah), the drive to shvitz over a piece of Gemara, to delve deeper and more intensely into the real meaning of a *Posuk*, to invest time and thought into the intricacies of Torah learning is what is necessary if the student is to develop an everlasting appreciation of the text.

When such a process of study takes place, it is fair to assume that not only will there be appreciation, love, clarity, and commitment in the learning itself but, inevitably, what has been learned will be long remembered. The opposite, of course, is equally true. When Torah is learned with little effort little will be retained and even less will be loved and appreciated.

As they say, easy come, easy go.

As to the second reason offered by the Midrash, that each step in the journey is a reward unto itself, we know it is true intuitively that one is rewarded for each step taken whether the final destination is known or not, whether the destination is realized or not! The Steipler explains that when the destination is unknown, the nature of the reward is greater.

Take the example of the father rousing his children to take them on a journey. If they *know* the destination is Disneyworld then each step along the way is measured against the destination, the reward is not in the journey but in closing in on the destination. When one is aware of the destination to which God commanded to go, then every step evokes a certain amount of pleasure, gratification, satisfaction, as he comes closer to his goal because each step brings him closer to fulfilling God’s command. However, that pleasure in “getting closer” detracts from the fact that this is *God’s command he is fulfilling* (and so “intermediate pleasure” should never come to bear). On the other hand, if one is unaware of his destination, then there can never be the sense of “only another five miles…” or “only another hour” and it is only the reward of the path that he enjoys. His every step provides him with absolute satisfaction that he is fulfilling God’s command, and journeying “to the land I will show you.”

Such fulfillment of God’s will is pure, unadulterated. Each step is fullness rather than just “another step along the way”. This is true Li’Shma – for the sake of God’s name, for the sake of the mitzvah itself.

When we rush headlong, demanding now, now, now we not only lose sight of that truth but we numb our ability to find joy in the journey. As a result, we lose out on so many of the joys and rewards that life – this great journey of ours – holds out for us. Study is diminished. Prayer is unfulfilling (gotta pray fast, my train is coming!) Marriages are destroyed. Children are ignored.

If only we understood that we really do have everything we need now our journeys would be so much more rewarding!