

Dear Friends,

The passage that opens this week's parasha deals entirely with motion:

"When you **come** to the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, put it in a basket and **come** to the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name. You shall **come** to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, "I acknowledge this day before the LORD your God that I have **come** the land..." (D'varim 26: 1-3)

The verb that is most prominent in this passage is "**come**" (to the land, to the place, to the priest). This raises the question, why does it NOT say "**arrive**"?

The difference is that arriving is a result, an end product, whereas coming deals with direction and an ongoing process of drawing near.

Rabbi Nachman said famously "Everywhere I go, I go to Eretz Yisrael". Eretz Yisrael is the metaphorical place that every person seeks. It is a mark on an inner compass rather than a specific geographic location. On his famous journey to Eretz Yisrael in 1798, Rabbi Nachman shocked his escorts by not visiting Jerusalem! Instead, he returned to Europe after visiting Tiberias and Haifa. He did not want to arrive, he wanted to be on a journey, to be on the way. Being on the way to Eretz Yisrael is a continuous process of drawing near, but never arriving to a final destination.

We all sometimes have the feeling that we are stuck, or on the wrong path, one that we did not choose. Rabbi Nachman suggests that we are always on *our* path, even if it is difficult, frustrating, and confusing. We are never off our path. As long as we are in motion the path we are on is always ours, and it always takes us to "Eretz Yisrael."

The parasha then continues with the statement made famous in the Pesach Haggadah. It was uttered by pilgrims arriving at the Temple in Jerusalem with the tithes of their crops, and begins thus: "My father was a lost Aramean. He went down to Egypt..." (D'varim. 26:5) This is an odd statement. Who is "my father"? Yaakov? But he was not an Aramean; Lavan - his uncle - was. But Lavan was not "my father." It seems, then, that the verse refers to Avraham, the master of going forth - Lech Lecha - to Eretz Yisrael.

Both Avraham and Yaakov lose their way at one point in life, and end up in Egypt.

But if we are always on our way to Eretz Yisrael how is it possible to lose one's way and go to Egypt?

The statement made by the pilgrim in the Temple echos a **sense of being lost**. Going down to Egypt was not a problem. They simply confused “coming” and “arriving”. Anyone who confuses between the two might get stuck and become enslaved to the deceptive sense of having arrived at one’s destination.

But then, from the depths of enslavement and despair, the cry rises. It is heard by the God of “Ki Tavo” - “to come” - to be continually in motion, and to draw near.

This is the God of Israel, the God of eternal motion and nearness.

Therefore, it stated later on in the parasha: “You have affirmed this day that the LORD is your God, that you will **walk in His ways...**” (26:17) - walk in the ways of eternal motion and forever draw near.

This is why pilgrims - you, me, all of us - when we count our blessings, declare to the God of motion and nearness: “We stand before you this day and we remember that if we think that our achievements mean that we have arrived, we will become a “lost Aramean”, and we will experience enslavement again.

So may we all walk in His ways. Forever in motion, always drawing near. Never arriving, God forbid.

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha