

“You’ve Arrived at Your Destination?”
Erev Rosh Hashanah 2015
Rabbi Carl M. Perkins
(inspired by Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb)

Just about all of us now use GPS in our cars to help us get to where we want to go. This is remarkably helpful to us, but we should be aware that it actually marks a profound change in our understanding where we are in the world.

It used to be that we used maps. When you use a map, you know where you are: you know the environment, you know the route, you know the destination.

Now, generally, when we’re in the car, all we know is how far we have to go before we turn. We’re left frankly, “flying blind”—unless we zoom out from our screen (not easy to do safely when we’re behind the wheel) and take it all in.

This is a useful metaphor to play with as we consider the work that lies before us on these holy days.

Where are we on our journey in life? Do we really know?

Sometimes, it seems, we’re just aware of what’s happening right now, and what the next move is. It’s as if we’re looking at that GPS and all we can see is the next turn.

One of the purposes of these holy days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, is to slow us down and to help us zoom out and reflect on where we’ve come from and where we’re heading.

That’s very helpful, and I hope that we’ll make use of these days to do that kind of work.

These holidays can help us in several other ways.



For example, sometimes, when we are driving, we take a wrong turn. It happens! We're distracted; we're confused. What does our GPS tell us: "Recalculating." In a sense, that is what the shofar is designed to do: wake us up and nudge us to "Recalculate!" Whether we listen or not is another thing, but that is what we're supposed to do.

One of the expressions you'll hear—perhaps the expression you *most* want to hear—on some of the GPS apps (such as WAZE) is, "You've arrived at your destination." That's always a welcome message—unless, of course, either you entered the address incorrectly or the machine is acting up. That's happened to me a few times. Once I was wanted to visit someone in Winchester, and my GPS brought me to Medford. It wasn't that far from where I wanted to go, *but it wasn't my desired destination.*

That's a great expression to ponder on these days. Can any of us *ever* say that we have arrived at our destination? Is that how we feel, or is that how we'd *like* to feel? Is it ever possible to do that?

What would it look like to arrive at our destination? Do we have this image before us of: the perfect house, the perfect spouse, the perfect family, the perfect job, the perfect this or that?

Life isn't like that.

We're told in the beginning of Genesis, chapter 37, that Jacob, the Patriarch, wanted to settle down. "*Vayeshev yaakov b'ereetz m'gurei aviv.—And Jacob settled in the land where his ancestors wandered.*" "Not so fast!" say the commentators. As Rashi tells us, in this world, righteous people don't ever get the privilege of settling down. They're always on the move. They never arrive at their destination.

Who is the classic example of that? Moses. As we know, Moses never made it to the Promised Land, and no, it wasn't because he didn't stop to get directions. It's because—and maybe he didn't know this during his lifetime—his role in life was to lead his people during their years of wandering in the wilderness. It wasn't for him to arrive at his desired destination.

As it says in Pirkei Avot, *Lo alecha hamlachah ligmor, ...* It isn't for us to finish the task; but on the other hand, *lo atah ben-horin l'hibatel mimenu,*

you're not free to just give it up; you have to keep trying.

This notion is reinforced in our tradition. When you study and study and study, in the Western world, you become a scholar. But in the Jewish tradition, the word for a scholar is "*talmid chakham*," literally, a "student of the wise." *That's* the goal! It's not to know everything. The goal is to be a perpetual student.

It's the journey, not the destination that is the key, and we have to invest our life-long journeys with energy and purpose. Otherwise, well, ... think about that Paul Simon song, Slip Slidin' Away:

Slip slidin' away
Slip slidin' away
You know the nearer your destination
The more you're slip slidin' away

God only knows
God makes his plan
The information's unavailable
To the mortal man
We work our jobs
Collect our pay
Believe we're gliding down the highway
When in fact we're slip slidin' away

Slip slidin' away
Slip slidin' away
You know the nearer your destination
The more you're slip slidin' away

In the 1950s, Cunard Cruise Lines had a famous slogan on their advertisements: "Getting there is half the fun."



We no longer take ships to and from Europe, but the point still stands.

This is life. Let's be thankful for it.

Why do we eat apples and honey on Rosh Hashanah? We're celebrating! We've been privileged to live another year, and a new year is about to begin, with new opportunities to study our tradition, to perform mitzvot, to help make this world a better place.

Let's enjoy our YomTov, and let's enjoy our journey together!

Shanah tovah u'm'tukah: a good and a sweet year for all!