

Parshat Beha'alotecha 5778

כט וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה, לְהַבִּיב בְּנֵי-רַעוּיָאֵל הַמְדִּינִי חֵתָן מִשָּׂה, בְּסַעֲיִם אֲנִיחֵנוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה, אֲתוּ אִתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לָכֵם; לָכֵה אֲתָנוּ וְהִטְבַּנּוּ לָךְ,

(Perek 10 v 29) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, לֹא אֵלֶיךָ. כִּי אִם-אֶל-אֶרֶצִי וְאֶל-מִוְלַדְתִּי, אֵלֶיךָ

This roughly translates to –Moshe said to his father in law “*we are moving on to the place that Hashem has given to us*”, “*Come with us and it will be good for you*”. And he (his father in law) answered, “*I will not go, but I will go to my land and birthplace*”.

Beha'alotecha is a sedra rich in stories and famous texts, starting with the lighting of the menorah in the bais hamikdash, then the parsha of the leviim, followed by the story of pesach sheyni, the Chatozeros and then some of the Bnai Yisroel's travels. Next the parsha tells us about the complaints of the Jews about a lack of food and finishes with the episode of loshon hora which Miriam spoke about Moshe her brother. It is easy to see why the dialogue above does not feature as a highlight.

Moshe is begging his father in law to join him and the Jewish people on their journey to Eretz Yisroel. Yisro appears reluctant and suggests he will return to his birthplace. Moshe however does not give up and asks again, telling Yisro that it is in everyone's interest that they travel together. In fact, we do not know if Moshe was successful with his pleas and whether he convinced Yisro to go with or not.

However, if we analyse the text, there are some obvious questions to consider, and the answers can give us a greater understanding of the relationship between Moshe and his father in law and what that might mean for us.

- 1) Why does Moshe use the word בָּסַעֲיִם to say that Bnai Yisroel are going, but when he invites Yisro to join them he says, לָכֵה אֲתָנוּ which is a change of verb
- 2) Why did Moshe call his father in law “Chovov” rather than Yisro.

The Kli Yakar, who served as the Rav of Prague in the early 17th Century, explains that when you travel to a new place you can be in two frames of mind. Sometimes you are going somewhere not only in body but also with a wholehearted commitment to the new place. This is when someone is בָּסַעֲיִם.

However there are other times, where physically you are in the new place, but you don't recognise it as home. Your heart is still very much somewhere else. The correct verb to use when someone travels without full commitment is לָךְ

The Kli Yakar brings a famous example to demonstrate this. Avraham is told by Hashem “Lech Lecha” leave your land, but at that stage he might have been reluctant to leave. However, that parsha ends up that Avraham travelled “Haloch Venasoa Hanegba”; he knew that he was starting a new life and went with a full heart.

In our Parsha Moshe realised (as brought by Rashi on possuk 31) that his father in law was concerned that there would be no land allocation for converts in Israel. He therefore didn't call him Yisro, which comes from Yesser ie something spare or left over, which implied that he would not get land, but Chovov, which means beloved ie that he would very much be part of the inheritance and would be allocated land like the rest of Bnai Yisroel. Therefore Moshe said to him, בְּסַעֲיִם אֲנִיחֵנוּ, we are going with a full heart as we know that there will be land for us. However, he understood that his father in law would be less comfortable and could not have the same level of commitment to the journey. He therefore invited him to לָכֵה אֲתָנוּ, like Avraham, just try it and you will see that it will work out for you too. However, Yisro got angry at this suggestion that he was not fully committed and responded, that it is only with reference to his past that he uses אֵלֶיךָ but he was now fully part of Am Yisroel and had the same level of attachment to the land of Israel as the rest of the people.

This explanation moves away from the obvious reading of the text, as Yisro's response is not that he will literally go to his birthplace, but on the contrary, his birthplace is somewhere from which he has loosened connections, but Eretz Yisroel is somewhere that he aspires to reach.

Rabbi Dr Tzvi Hersh Weinreb of the OU suggests that in addition to Hashem being our father; He is also our father in law, by virtue of us being married to His daughter, the Torah.

Moshe shared a close relationship with his father in law who provided guidance and advice throughout his life. As we develop our relationship with the Torah, we should still always request that Hashem, in the guise of our father in law, guides us in the correct way, and never leaves us, as Moshe pleaded to his father in law, Yisro.