

## **Message from the Parsha**

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### **The Destination and the Journey**

Earlier this month, Michal Loewenstern, the 10 year old daughter of Elisha Loewenstern HY"D, who fell in Gaza in December, sent a question to Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon asking him when will her father HY"D return through TECHIYAT HAMEITIM? Will it be immediately after Mashiach comes? How will he look? Will he look the same as he did when he left home to protect Am Yisrael?

Ten times in Tanach, we are informed that a donkey is the mode of transportation in a biblical drama. These include Avraham's journey to the Akeida (B'reishit 22:3), Moshe's family's travels back to Egypt (Sh'mot 4:20), and of course our parsha, where the donkey even has a speaking part (Bamidbar 22:28). These donkey references stand out because in most cases when someone travels in Tanach, we are not told how they travel. Avraham is told in Lech Lecha to set out for the Promised Land, but we're not told how. He and his wife then descend to Egypt, but we're not told how. Moshe is forced to flee from Egypt, but we are not told how. And all this makes sense; the modes of transportation are not really information that the Torah

really needs to tell us. They don't seem to be relevant or important. So why, then, are there ten stories in which we are informed that the journey was made on a donkey?

In truth, there is a commonality between all these stories. Every time a biblical figure is described as traveling on a donkey, the intended purpose of the stated trip is never realized as first envisioned. Avraham travels to sacrifice his son - it doesn't happen. Moshe travels to bring his family back to Egypt - his family never arrives, but returns to the house of Yitro. Bilam rides on a donkey with a mission to curse the Jewish people - but instead, his words are transformed into blessings.

This reflects how often even in our own journeys through life, we can't really control the destination. Many times we travel great distances to actualize our dreams; we wish to participate in the redemptive march, the march of the sacrifice of Avraham, the march of the liberation by Moshe, the messianic march that includes all people, as is represented by the inclusion of the Bilam story in our canonized Torah (Baba Batra 14b). But sometimes it is much more challenging to reach our ultimate goals than we expected, as we have been witness to over these troubling nine months. Like in Tanach, we're never fully guaranteed that we will

arrive at the final destination that we have in mind, and all we can do is set out on the journey.

In the human experience, there's no guarantee of a safe and successful landing and return. What is critical is not the ultimate destination but the values we bring to the journey of life. Elisha Loewenstern and nearly 700 other fallen heroes left their homes with one thought to honor the values that they have lived throughout their lives: a concern for Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael. They did not know they would fall after saving hundreds, but it was never about the destination - it was always about the journey.

For those of us who have lost family and friends - and for many others in our small nation who feel a deep connection to the sacrifices made during this war - we seek and pray for a good ending. But even the Mashiach arrives on a donkey, because getting to the messianic era is also part of our journey, giving us the strength to go on, to live and hope deeply for the best.

In reality, the only thing in our control is the integrity and the values that we bring to the journey. It's the vision for Jewish living, the vision of a State with holiness; it's the creation of a full, robust Jewish life; it's about taking with us on the journey a commitment to civic responsibility, and the ability to show resilience

even in troubling times. It's about the transformation that we see happening in Israeli society through our youth, and the national ethos that we can create along our journey. It's about the new narrative and the new normal that we can't yet fully grasp but we are beginning to shape. It's about a generation that is thirsty for spirituality and purpose, and although one would not blame this generation for rebelling against God after everything that we've gone through, just the opposite has happened, with so many young people newly engaging with faith. Our vision must be one in which we continually ask ourselves what values we bring to the journey, and we can only pray that God allows us to arrive at the destination.