

# Living with Impermanence to the Fullest

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The description of the Israelites sojourning in the desert is offered in great detail (see Numbers 9:15-23). Time and time again, the Israelites take their cue from the cloud which would either cover the Mishkan (the Tent of Testimony) or depart from it. At each point of departure and at each stop, the Israelites obeyed the will of God:

עַל פִּי יְקֻקֵּי יְהוָה וְעַל פִּי יְקֻקֵּי יְסָעוּ

“...At the Lord's bidding they traveled and at the Lord's bidding they encamped.” (Numbers 9:20)

The extent of the Israelites' encampments were unpredictable as well. At times, they remained in place for just a day. At other times, they encamped for as many as 19 years (see Rashi on Deut. 1:46).

The Ramban explains that the Torah goes to great lengths in detailing these travels in the desert in praise of the Israelites. According to the Ramban, the Israelites remained in place for long periods of time, even in places that offered little comfort, so as to fulfill the will of God. Furthermore, the Israelites would hastily depart from an encampment site that provided good respite and relief even after one day, if God willed it. The Ramban notes, “This involved even greater mental exertion than the previous scenario, because the people thought that they would be staying there for a longer period of time, so they unloaded the wagons and put away their baggage, as is the custom of those who arrive at their destination from a journey, and then, when the cloud was raised up from upon the Tabernacle, they would have to load the wagons again, and furthermore they would not be able to make for themselves preparations for the road because there would not be enough time” (Ramban on Deut. 9:19).

For the Ramban, the unpredictable nature of the Israelites' travels in the desert was a form of faith exercise, meant to flex the nation's ability to demonstrate their trust in God.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l raised a question in the hope of deepening our understanding of these travels even further. In one of his discourses on the Torah portion, the rebbe asked: “What was the point of the hundreds of man-hours involved in erecting the Tabernacle, if it was to be dismantled soon afterwards, sometimes the following day?” In response to his own question, the rebbe replied: “The *Talmud* explains that since, *‘they encamped by the word of God, and they traveled by the word of God’* (v. 23), each encampment was not considered to be transitory in nature, because the direct Divine command to camp at that point, *‘conferred it with the importance of a permanent settlement’* (*Eruvin 55b*)” (The Lubavitcher Rabbe, Based on *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayigash 5747*).

This teaching can be enriched by a reflection given by Sivan Rahav-Meir in her contemporary commentary on the Parsha. Sivan Rahav-Meir draws two main lessons from the Torah's tedious description of these travels: “First, we are not really the ones who plan and control our lives, and things happen that we did not plan or ask for. We have to face this fact of life and internalize that we must expect the unexpected. Second, we do not need to put our lives on hold whenever we find ourselves temporarily moving from place to place. We should not wait until we reach our destination, until we enter the Land of Israel. We have to learn to live every moment to the fullest, even when we are still on the journey. There is no point in waiting until we reach our final destination, because we really have no idea how long each stage of the journey will last” (Sivan Rahav-Meir, #Parsha, p. 216).

During these times of great uncertainty – are we in phase 1, 2 or 3 and what will the next phase be like? – let us learn from the Israelites' journeys in the desert. We can't put our lives on hold just because things seem less and less permanent right now. Instead, let us learn to make each stop along the way, or rather each phase along the way, as long as it might last, meaningful, significant, and ultimately conferred with the importance of a permanent location...until, we're ready and set to move yet again.

## 1. Numbers 9:15-23

15 On the day the Mishkan was erected, the cloud covered the Mishkan, which

במדבר פרשת בהעלותך פרק

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was a tent for the Testimony, and at evening, there was over the Mishkan like an appearance of fire, [which remained] until morning.

16 So it was always, the cloud covered it and there was an appearance of fire at night.

17 and according to the cloud's departure from over the Tent, and afterwards, the children of Israel would travel, and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would encamp.

18 At the bidding of the Lord, the children of Israel traveled, and at the bidding of the Lord, they encamped. As long as the cloud hovered above the Mishkan, they encamped.

19 When the cloud lingered over the Mishkan for many days, the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord and did not travel.

20 Sometimes, the cloud remained for several days above the Mishkan; at the Lord's bidding they traveled and at the Lord's bidding they encamped.

21 Sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning, and when the cloud departed in the morning, they traveled. Or, the cloud remained for a day and a night, and when the cloud departed, they traveled.

22 Whether it was for two days, a month or a year, that the cloud lingered to hover over the Mishkan, the children of Israel would encamp and not travel, and when it departed, they traveled.

23 At the Lord's bidding they would encamp, and at the Lord's bidding they would travel; they kept the charge of the Lord by the word of the Lord through Moses.

טו) וְיָיִום הַקִּיּוֹם אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן כְּסֹה הָעֲנַן אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְאֹהֶל הָעֵדֻת וּבְעָרֵב יְהִיֶּה עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן כְּמִרְאֵה אֵשׁ עַד בֹּקֶר:

טז) כֵּן יְהִיֶּה תְּמִיד הָעֲנַן וְכִסּוֹנוֹ וּמִרְאֵה אֵשׁ לַיְלָה:

יז) וּלְפִי הָעֲלוֹת הָעֲנַן מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְאֲחֲרָי כֵּן יִסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֹּן שָׁם הָעֲנַן שָׁם יִחַנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

יח) עַל פִּי יְקוּקֹה יִסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל פִּי יְקוּקֹה יִחַנוּ כָּל יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֹּן הָעֲנַן עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְיִחַנוּ:

יט) וּבְהֶאֱרִיךְ הָעֲנַן עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן יָמִים רַבִּים וְשָׁמְרוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מִשְׁמֶרֶת יְקוּקֹה וְלֹא יִסְעוּ:

כ) וַיֵּשׁ אֲשֶׁר יְהִיֶּה הָעֲנַן יָמִים מְסֻפָּר עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן עַל פִּי יְקוּקֹה וְיִחַנוּ וְעַל פִּי יְקוּקֹה יִסְעוּ:

כא) וַיֵּשׁ אֲשֶׁר יְהִיֶּה הָעֲנַן מְעַרֵב עַד בֹּקֶר וְנִעְלָה הָעֲנַן בַּבֹּקֶר וְנִסְעוּ אוֹ יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה וְנִעְלָה הָעֲנַן וְנִסְעוּ:

כב) אוֹ יָמִים אוֹ חֲדָשׁ אוֹ יָמִים כְּהֶאֱרִיךְ הָעֲנַן עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְשָׁכֵן עָלָיו וְיִחַנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא יִסְעוּ וּבְהֶעֱלֵתוֹ יִסְעוּ:

כג) עַל פִּי יְקוּקֹה וְיִחַנוּ וְעַל פִּי יְקוּקֹה יִסְעוּ אֶת מִשְׁמֶרֶת יְקוּקֹה שָׁמְרוּ עַל פִּי יְקוּקֹה בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה: פ

## 2. Ramban on Numbers 9:19

The explanation of *when the cloud lingered, etc.*, is to tell us that even if the cloud would linger upon the Tabernacle many days in a particular place, and that place was not good in the eyes of [the Israelites], and they greatly wanted and desired to journey on from that place, nevertheless they did not transgress the will of God and stayed in their place. And this is the meaning of the end of our verse, *the Children of Israel would keep the charge of HaShem and would not journey* – that out of fear of God and their keeping the charge of His command they would not journey.

Similarly, Scripture goes on to relate, *if the cloud would be upon the Tabernacle for a number of days* (v. 20), meaning around two or three days, and the people were very weary and “He weakened their strength on the journey,” so that they would have preferred to encamp longer in their present location to rest longer, nevertheless they would do the will of God to walk after the cloud, as the verse concludes: *according to the word of HaShem they would encamp and according to the word of HaShem they would journey.*

## רמב"ן במדבר פרשת בהעלותך פרק ט

יט) וטעם ובהאריך הענן - לומר כי אם יאריך הענן על המשכן ימים רבים, והמקום ההוא איננו טוב בעיניהם והיו חפצים ומתאווים מאד לנסוע מן המקום, אעפ"כ לא יעברו על רצון השם. וזה טעם ושמרו בני ישראל את משמרתה' ולא יסעו - כי מיראת השם ומשמרם משמרת מצותו לא יסעו. וכן אם יהיה הענן ימים מספר כשנים או שלשה ימים, והיו העם יגיעים מאד וענה בדרך כחם, יעשו רצון השם ללכת

<p>Scripture further relates that sometimes the cloud would remain over the Tabernacle only <i>from evening until morning</i> (v. 21), and [the Israelites] would accordingly stay in a certain place only one night and then continue to journey in the morning, even though that involved great exertion for them. And sometimes, the verse continues, the cloud would stand over the Tabernacle <i>for a day and a night</i>, because they had walked all night and came to that place in the morning, and the cloud would rest there all that day and all the following night, and it would be lifted on the second morning and they would journey that morning. This involved even greater mental exertion than the previous scenario, because the people thought that they would be staying there for a longer period of time, so they unloaded the wagons and put away their baggage, as is the custom of those who arrive at their destination from a journey, and then, when the cloud was raised up from upon the Tabernacle, they would have to load the wagons again, and furthermore they would not be able to make for themselves preparations for the road because there would not be enough time.</p>	<p>אחרי הענן:  וסיפר עוד (פסוק כא), כי יש  שלא יעמדו רק לילה אחד ויסעו  בבקר אע"פ שהוא טורח גדול  להם. ולפעמים יעמוד הענן יומם  ולילה, כי הלכו כל הלילה ובאו  במקום ההוא בבקר וינוח הענן  שם כל היום ההוא וכל הלילה  ונעלה בבקר השני ונסעו, והוא  טורח גדול מן הראשון, כי היו  העם סבורים שיעמדו שם ופרקו  העגלות והניחו משאם כמנהג  הבאים מן הדרך ובהעלות הענן  יחזרו לטעון ולא יוכלו לעשות  להם תקון לדרך.</p>
<p><b>3. R. Moshe Medolina, <i>Divrei Moshe</i></b></p> <p>22) “Whether it be for two days, or a month, or a year” – Even if a person’s efforts to elevate through his worship of God takes an increasingly long time – “Whether it be for two days, or a month, or a year” – he must never give up – even as “the cloud lingered to hover over the Mishkan” – and he must not be frightened by the length, for ultimately he shall achieve his set goal – for the “the children of Israel would encamp.”</p>	<p><b>רבי משה מדולינא, דברי משה</b></p> <p>כב) או ימים או חדש או ימים -  גם אם התעלות האדם בעבודתו  יתברך, נמשכת והולכת זמן רב -  או ימים או חדש או ימים -  חלילה לו מלהתייאש גם אם -  בהאריך הענן על המשכן - ולא  יירתע מהאריכות, כי בסופו של  דבר ישיג את שלו - יחנו בני  ישראל.</p>
<p><b>4. The Lubavitcher Rabbe, Based on <i>Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayigash 5747</i></b></p> <p>Often the Jewish people would stay encamped in one place for a considerable period of time – as much as 19 years (<i>Rashi to Devarim 1:46</i>) – so the need for fully erecting the Tabernacle, with all the labor involved, was understood. But “<i>sometimes, the cloud remained for (just) a few days... and sometimes the cloud remained from night until morning, and when the cloud rose in the morning, they traveled</i>” (v. 20-21).  So what was the point of the hundreds of man-hours involved in erecting the Tabernacle, if it was to be dismantled soon afterwards, sometimes the following day?  The <i>Talmud</i> explains that since, “<i>they encamped by the word of God, and they traveled by the word of God</i>” (v. 23), each encampment was not considered to be transitory in nature, because the direct Divine command to camp at that point, “<i>conferred it with the importance of a permanent settlement</i>” (<i>Eruvin 55b</i>).</p>	
<p><b>5. Sivan Rahav-Meir, #Parsha, p. 216</b></p> <p>First, we are not really the ones who plan and control our lives, and things happen that we did not plan or ask for. We have to face this fact of life and internalize that we must expect the unexpected.</p> <p>Second, we do not need to put our lives on hold whenever we find ourselves temporarily moving from place to place. We should not wait until we reach our destination, until we enter the Land of Israel. We have to learn to</p>	

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