

“אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל”

(במדבר לג:א)

The Journeys That Bring Compassion

THE TEACHING

The Midrash teaches that the journeys of the children of Israel (מַסְעֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), their travels from place to place, atone for “אֵלֶּה אֱלֹקֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל” (שמות לב:ד), the golden calf, that is, for the blemish of idolatry (פְּגַם עֲבֹדָה זָרָה).

Even without serving idols the blemish can be there, for a weakening of faith (קְלָקוּל הָאֱמוּנָה) is also a kind of idolatry. As brought in the name of the Baal Shem Tov on “וְסִרְתָּם וְעִבְדְּתָם אֱלֹקִים אֲחֵרִים” (דברים יא:טז): as soon as one turns away from Hashem, it is already that.

MAIN POINTS

- “כָּל זְמַן שֶׁיֵּשׁ עֲבֹדָה זָרָה בְּעוֹלָם, חֲרוֹן-אֵף בְּעוֹלָם”, “as long as there is idolatry in the world, there is anger in the world.”
- So when the blemish of idolatry is atoned, the anger is sweetened and compassion (רַחֲמָנוּת) is drawn down.
- The main compassion is “וְיָקֹל-לְשׁוֹן-דִּי יִתֵּן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים” (בראשית מג:יד), “and Kel Shakai will give you compassion”: “לָכֶם”, you, precisely.
- With Hashem, even a hard illness and suffering may truly be His compassion; all He does is only compassion.
- But we cannot understand or receive His compassion in that form, so we ask that He place it in our hands, that we may have compassion on ourselves plainly: to be healed of illness.
- And יִשְׂרָאֵל is the initials (ראשי תבואת) of “וְיָקֹל-לְשׁוֹן-דִּי יִתֵּן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים”, for the compassion comes through the journeys of Israel.

A PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY · OUR OWN REFLECTION

Every trip, every move from place to place, can repair a little of our faith. And we may ask Hashem openly for compassion in a form we can understand and receive.

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