

SEASONS OF THE MOON

THE MONTH OF SIVAN

Sivan 5759 / May 16, 1999 - June 14, 1999

THE LAST FRONTIER

Very soon, only the speed of light will limit our ability to communicate a thought, a picture, a sound or a sentence from one side of the world to the other, and beyond.

The meaning of the word “distance” has changed forever.

Just as the electron has shrunk our world, so has there been a quiet and maybe even more fundamental revolution in the way we look at traveling. We see nothing special in the fact that several hundred people can walk into a large metal room and find themselves on the other side of the world in a matter of hours. In fact, the major drawback in circling the earth in a jet-plane may be an aching back from sitting in a reclining chair that doesn't quite live up to its name. A little more than a hundred years ago, to circumnavigate the globe would have required months of arduous, dangerous and expensive effort, almost beyond our imagining.

We have breached the last frontier. Distance has become no more than a function of time spent in a chair.

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

The electron and the 747 have had their impact on our culture in other ways: Our cultural mindset mandates that speed is of the essence. *Where am I going?* is now less important than *How fast can I get there?* Immediacy has become a yardstick of worth. How fast is your car? Your computer? Our age has sought to devour distance and time, rendering everything in a constant and immediate present. Now this. Now this. Now this. (Interestingly

THE ULTIMATE MESSAGE

the languages of the age — film and television, computer graphics — are languages which have trouble expressing the past and the future. They only have a present tense. Everything happens in a continuous present.)

All of which makes it very difficult for us to understand what it means to receive the Torah.

ON THE BEACH

Why did G-d give the Torah to the Jewish People in the middle of a desert? Why didn't He give it on the other side of *Yam Suf* (the Sea of Reeds)? Once the Egyptian army had been safely dispatched and the Jewish People had finished singing the Song at the Sea, wouldn't that have been an appropriate

time to give the Torah? And even if you'll say that the Jewish People weren't ready for the Torah at that point, that they were too steeped in the flesh-pots of Egypt, that they needed time to purify themselves; fine, so why didn't they just camp there on the beach for seven weeks? On the beach, their biggest problem would have been sunburn. Why did they have to *schlep*

hundreds of miles through an inhospitable desert to some small mountain in the middle of nowhere?

THE PATH OF THE JUST

We talk of spirituality as being a path. The spiritual path.



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THE ULTIMATE MESSAGE *continued*

For, in truth, travel is no more than a physical paradigm of the spiritual road. The quest for spirituality demands that we travel; if not physically, then certainly in our soul we must notch up the miles. If we refuse this invitation to journey, the groove of our lives becomes a rut. We think we are traveling, but we are just wearing down the same circular path. The spiritual road requires us to forsake the comfortable, the familiar ever-repeating landmarks of our personalities, and set out with an open mind and a humble soul. We must divest ourselves of the fawning icons of our own egos by which we have defined and confined ourselves, and journey. Physical traveling is no more than the concretization of this internal process. The physical journey gives expression to the spiritual progress.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER

In Hebrew, the word for the imperative "Go!" is written with exactly the same two letters as the phrase "to yourself." When G-d took Avraham out of Ur Kasdim and sent him to the Land of Israel, He used those two identical words, *Lech Lecha*, which can be translated: "Go to yourself." The spiritual path is always a process of going. Of moving, of progressing. And inevitably, as in any journey, when we conquer the obstacles that lie in our path, we grow in stature. By overcoming the difficulties along the way, we connect with the fundamental purpose of the journey: To travel inward, to reach inside to our true selves. We "go to ourselves."

BENEATH AND BEYOND

But the spiritual path is not just a journey inside. It is a path to a world beyond. Avraham traveled the length and breadth of *Eretz Yisrael*. There is an *Eretz Yisrael* of the body and there is an *Eretz Yisrael* of the soul. To experience that higher reality, Avraham had to travel throughout its physical counterpart. Similarly, when the Jews left Egypt, they needed to travel a spiritual road which would lead them not just to a physical place called Har Sinai, but to its spiritual *doppelganger* as well.

But why a desert?

The Jewish People needed to travel through a desert because they needed to become like the desert, devoid of preconceptions, unencumbered by the spiritual baggage of Egypt. Sitting on the beach would never have brought them to that spiritual state.

SIVAN, MERCURY, AND THE ULTIMATE MESSAGE

The month of *Sivan* is associated with the planet Mercury. Mercury symbolizes communication. Thus it is that the Torah was given in the month of *Sivan*. Because The Torah is the Ultimate Communication. Every communication, every message must come from one place and arrive at another, from "there" to "here." The Torah is the Ultimate Message. Thus it can only be received by way of a journey. For a journey is always from "there" to "here." The seven weeks of journeying in the desert, from Egypt to Sinai, are a paradigm of the Ultimate Communication from There to here.

SPACE EATERS

Our age seeks to devour distance. To make it into nothing. We live in a world which has no patience. A world which cannot wait. A world which has no time for physical travel and even less with its spiritual counterpart. We live in an era of "instant spirituality," a contradiction in terms. There is no such thing

as instant spirituality. Spirituality is a path. A path contains a myriad of small individual steps. And if we are ever to reach our destination, each one of those steps must be guided by G-d's "Guidebook for the Human Race," the Holy Torah. It must be followed step by step.

If we want to travel the pathway of the soul, we must know that life is a journey, that we must move. If, however, we want to lie on the beach in a spiritual deckchair, reading a paperback "*Kabbala in Four or Five Easy Lessons*," we will never make it to our own individual rendezvous at Sinai.

TRAINS

I love trains.

I love the message of their wheels
chattering hope
and what's in store
around the bend.

When I was a child,
every train had a face
and a chimney belching smoke.

Every train had a smile.
Every train chuffed out its message
over and over:

"Wherever you go —
there you are.
Wherever you go —
there you are."