

THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

19 - 20 June, 2009

28 Sivan 5769

Parashat Shelach
(Numbers 13:1–15:41)

Rabbi Stan Zamek
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk

While I still have one more Shabbat Shalom column to go before we head to the US on holiday, I fear that many of you will have already scattered if I wait to publish my "have a great summer" message until next week. So here goes.

We Jews have always been great travelers. As you well know, we have established ourselves on every continent of the globe (I think there are even a few of us in Antarctica). Historically our mobility was not a matter of choice. It was necessitated by the need to make a living and to find some place to live in peace. Until modern times, travel was not something we did for fun.

The life of a Jewish trader of even just a century ago was extremely hazardous. Ships sank and were attacked by pirates. Bandits and raiders hounded travelers moving overland. Jews were regularly kidnapped because pirates and brigands knew about the Jewish obligation to redeem captives.

The Jerusalem Talmud sums up the Rabbis' attitude toward travel succinctly: "In all journeys there is a presumption of mortal danger." This sentiment is not likely to be used as Cathay Pacific jingle.

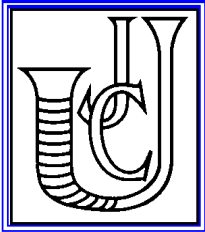
Given the presumed dangers, the Talmud prescribes this procedure for the traveler:

"When you go forth on a journey seek the counsel of your Maker. What is meant by 'seek the counsel of your maker?' It refers to the prayer before setting out on a journey. What is the prayer? May it be Your will, O Lord my God, that you lead me forth in peace and direct my steps in peace, and uphold me in peace, and deliver me from every foe and ambush on the way, and send blessing to the works of my hands, and cause me to find grace, kindness, and mercy in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who see me. Blessed are you who hears prayer."

With a change in person in most versions, this is basically the text of T'filat HaDerech, the Traveler's Prayer, that it is used today. The prayer is supposed to be said before beginning any journey of one Persian mile or longer---that is three miles or more by today's measurement.

I regularly say this prayer. I carry little T'filat HaDerech cards in my airline ticket wallet. As the plane taxis down the runway I say my prayer. I have often wondered whether my seat mates find this comforting or whether they are wondering if there is something I know that they don't. I say the prayer before long road trips as well. But then when I am driving, all my passengers are praying.

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THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

12 - 13 June, 2009

21 Sivan 5769

Parashat Beha'alotecha
(Numbers 8:1–12:16)

Rabbi Stan Zamek
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

From the Rabbi's desk (con't)

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Do I believe that God will zap me if I forget to say the prayer? No. I don't believe God is that petty or bureaucratic. Do I really believe I am insulated from all harm by saying the prayer? Again---no, but I do find it comforting and so I say it.

Every time I say T'filat HaDerech I am particularly moved by the words, "Bless the work of our hands. May we find grace, love and compassion in Your sight and in the sight of all who see us". Travel is not just the process of getting from point A to point B. There are things we are meant to do and people we are meant to meet. In any trip there are elements of pilgrimage. There is almost always something new to be learned along the way. I see this section of the Traveler's Prayer as a plea that we be granted openness and awareness. The world too is Torah. To traverse it is to read the text. When we travel we are the yad tracing our way across the scroll of the world.

So I say the prayer in hopes that God will guard my steps, but also because I hope God will guide me toward something new and wonderful. I hope the same thing for you, which is why you will find a copy of T'filat HaDerech attached to this week's Shabbat Shalom. Print it and take it with you, whether you are off on a great adventure or heading out of town on the Airport Express for your umpteenth business trip. Go with open eyes and an open heart.

May God guard and guide your steps and bring blessing to the work of your hands on whatever roads you may travel this summer. Be well, be safe, and l'hitraot.

All Blessings
Rabbi Z
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18th June, 2009

The Traveler's Prayer

יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, שתוליכנו לשלום ותצמידנו לשלום ותדריכנו לשלום ותגיענו למחוז חפצנו לחיים ולשמחה ולשלום (ואם דעתו לחזור באותו היום אומר: ותחזירנו לביתנו לשלום) ותצילנו מפף כל אויב ואורב בדרך ומכל מיני פרעניות המתרגשות לבוא לעולם, ותשלח ברכה (בכל) מעשה ידינו, ותתגנו לחן ולחסד ולרחמים בעיניך ובעיני כל ראינו, ותשמע קול תחנונינו, כי אל שומע תפלה ותחנון אתה. ברוך אתה יי, שומע תפלה.

Yehi ratzon milfanecha, Adonai Eloheinu vaylohei avoteinu, shetolichenu l'shalom, v'tatzideinu l'shalom, v'tadricheinu l'shalom, v'tagi'einu limchoz cheftzeinu l'chayyim u'l'simcha u'l'shalom (v'tachzireinu l'veiteinu l'shalom) v'tatzileinu micaf kol oyeiv v'oreiv baderech u'mikol minei phuraniyot hamitragshot lavo la'olam, v'tishlach b'racha b'chol ma'asei yadeinu, vatitneinu l'chein, u'l'chesesed u'l'rachamim b'einecha u'v'einei chol ro'einu, v'tishma kol tachanuneinu, ki eil shomei'ah t'filah v'tachanun atah. Baruch atah Adonai, shomei'ah t'filah.

May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, to guide us in peace, to sustain us in peace, to lead us to our desired destination in health and joy and peace, and to bring us home in peace. Protect us from danger and from all calamities that threaten the world. Bless the work of our hands. May we find grace, love and compassion in Your sight and in the sight of all who see us. Hear our supplication, for You listen to prayer and supplication. Praised are You O Lord, who hears prayer.