

The nation is free, but their direction to the Promised Land was not to be direct.

**וַיְהִי בְשִׁלַּח פָּרְעֹה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָתַם אֱלֹקִים דֶּרֶךְ אֲרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי אָמַר
אֱלֹקִים כִּי־יִנָּתַם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרַיִם:**

“And it was when Pharaoh sent out the nation, and the Lord did not lead them in the way of the Land of the Philistines because it was near. Because the Lord said, ‘Lest the nation be led into seeing war, and they will return to Mitzrayim.’ (Shmos 13:17).

There is an interesting dichotomy in the pasuk between Pharaoh sending out the nation and Hashem leading them. Is there a message here? It says that the Lord did not lead them by way of the Philistines because it was near. As it is obvious the Philistine pass is the nearest route, what is the pasuk teaching? What war would the newly freed nation see and why would they desire a return to Mitzrayim?

It is not unthinkable that war would scare the nation. In the incident of the spies, they heard about war and they were afraid. They sinned and ended up in the desert 38 extra years. However, on further introspection this question does not pass muster. The nation did not run back to Mitzrayim after they encountered war with Amalek. (Ibid 17:8). Further, they ended up having to conquer the land under Yehoshua and did not return to the Land of Mitzrayim.

Another question is that Hashem already preempted the appearance at Har Sinai prior to sending Moshe to the Land of Mitzrayim. (Ibid 3:12). Further, it seems strange that seeing war would frighten the nation when they just experienced the downfall of their captors, the mightiest nation in the area, through miracles and wonders. Yes, the nation saw Pharaoh coming and cried that they could just have easily died in Mitzrayim as in the desert. (Ibid 14:3). However, that was said rhetorically.

“And it was when Pharaoh sent the nation out.” There was an aspect in the nation’s conscience that it was Pharaoh that sent out the nation. They did not fully appreciate that Hashem took them out. There were two more events that they needed to undergo in order to appreciate this point: the splitting of the Yam Suf and seeing the total annihilation of the Mitzriyim army (giving them total faith), and the Revelation at Har Sinai and learning the Torah (obtaining His Law and code of ethics).

Because of this, “And the Lord did not guide them.” נָתַם is a unconventional word to use for lead. It is used in the Torah only with Divine Providence. Avraham’s servant uses it when he talks about how it was the Lord of Avraham אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת “that guided me to the true path.” (Bereishis 24:48). It is closely tied to the word for “comfort.” This was not simply about leading the nation to freedom and their Land. Hashem had to teach them how to be free, how to live freely. He was guiding them along His path. Not just a

physical pathway to the Land, but the *spiritual* pathway to attain Torah and freedom and learning to live like freemen in their new lives and Promised Land.

“By way of the Land of the Philistines.” There is a dual meaning here. The easiest pass from Goshen to Canaan was the Way of Horus (then termed Way of the Land of the Philistines, because these sea peoples were entrenched in the Gaza territory, the southwest corner of Canaan). It was a series of towns and forts along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea between Canaan and Egypt. It was far from mere desert. There were established towns and fortifications as this was a main thoroughfare for commerce, travel, and war, during this era. The Hittim were constantly at war with Mitzrayim and using this pass. Mitzrayim likely had forts along this path, too. Hashem did not want them physically passing all of these fortifications and towns and coming up directly to Canaan, by this route. He also did not want them to come into contact with the mannerism and culture of the Philistines. *אֲרָץ אֲרָץ* is used for the culture of a people. Hashem had a different set of mores and morals to teach His newly freed nation.

“Because it was close.” It was too near to Canaan. The nation would get to Canaan, too soon. They were not ready, yet, to live in the Land. They first had to experience the two major events, as noted above.

“Because the Lord said, ‘Lest the nation is guided and sees war.’” Again, guided here is spiritual. They will see war. They will not experience it for themselves. Only Amalek was so bold as to attack the Bnei Yisroel. However, the people would see the forts and they would see mechanisms of war. They will be guided into thinking that there is only one way to live: war. War took them out of the Land of Mitzrayim. The ten makos destroyed their captures and their captor’s food sources. The forts in Canaan will then keep them safe from their neighbors.

“And they will return to Mitzrayim.” Mitzrayim likely had fortifications along with pathway so the people would have to endure the feeling of not yet leaving Mitzrayim. They will also fall back to the mentality of living in Mitzrayim (the Goshen district). One of the reasons for their slavery is that they grew numerous and many and stayed complacent in Goshen, Mitzrayim. (Shmos 1:7). They did not move to fulfill their promised destiny to settle the Lands of Canaan. They no longer taught about Yoseph (ibid 1:8) and how he promised them they would leave and go up to the Land or that his children were meant to be the kings. (Bereishis 50:24).

Hashem was guiding the nation to know: He was the sovereign of the entire world. He would completely wipe out Mitzrayim’s strength. He would bring them to His mountain so that they can receive his Torah and the Law of freedom. Therefore, He could not guide them through the culture of the Philistine people or directly into the Land lest they are deficient the skills to live properly in the Land. He had to first teach them their culture and have them believe in Him completely. (Shmos 14:31).

Additional Note: Mitzrayim and the Pilishtim both harassed the avos. An earlier Pharaoh tried to seduce Sarah. Avimelech and his people did similar to Sarah and Rivka and also disputed with Avraham and Yitzchok over wells. Mitzrayim was now all but destroyed. Hashem wanted to keep his nation away from the dishonest and antagonistic Pilishtim. There was also a treaty in place between Avraham and Yitzchok, and the Pilishtim. The new nation did not need this false sense of security to think they had peace. Hashem wanted to teach them how to obtain real peace and security: His Law.