

Since the war in Gaza began close to two years ago, we have been adding Psalm 121 to our morning and evening services. The Psalm begins:

אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל הַהָרִים מֵאֵן יָבֹא עֲזָרִי.  
*I look up to the mountains. From where will my help come?*

And it ends with:

ה' יִשְׁמָר צֵאתְךָ וּבֹאֶךָ מִעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם.  
*God will guard your going and coming from this time until eternity.*

With hundreds of recitations, these lines have become etched in our minds, and we have meditated on them often. That is true especially of the last line. On the one hand, **לֵצֵאת וּלְבֹא** - **Going and coming** is a very common trope in the Bible. The inversion, **לֵבֹא וּלְצֵאת** - **Coming and going** is also quite common. In Psalm 121 we have **going and coming**, but in our parasha, we have **coming and going**. Here is the text:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה בְּבֹאֶךָ וּבְרוּךְ אַתָּה בְּצֵאתְךָ. (דברים כח:ג-ו)  
*Blessed be you, in your coming in, blessed be you, in your going out.* (Deut. 28:3-6)

This, together with fertility, productivity, and more, is the blessing that is bestowed upon someone *who listens to God's voice and observes all of his commandments* (Deut. 28:1). We regularly refer to a clueless person as *someone who doesn't know if they are coming or going*. But in the Hebrew bible, there is in fact a very profound difference between **לֵצֵאת וּלְבֹא** - **Going and coming** (Psalm 121) and **לֵבֹא וּלְצֵאת** - **coming and going** (Deut. 28). Let's see if we can figure it out with three biblical examples of each.

### Psalm 121: **לֵצֵאת וּלְבֹא** - **Going and coming**

#### 1. Abraham **Leaves** Haran and **Comes** to Canaan (Gen. 12:5)

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת שְׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו וְאֶת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶצָה כְּנַעַן.

*Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, all their property that they had gained, and the persons whom they had made-their-own in Harran, and they went out to go to the land of Canaan. They came to the land of Canaan;*

Between Abraham's **departure** from Haran to his **arrival** in Canaan he has a journey. The Torah does not tell us what transpires on this journey, but it is obvious from the first verse of *Lekh Lekha* that the journey symbolizes Abraham's disengagement with his past, *his land, his birthplace, and his father's household*. Traversing boundaries is one of the key themes in the lives of Abraham and Jacob.

#### 2. Israel **Leaves** Egypt and **Arrives** in Canaan (Deut. 9:7)

זָכַר אֵל תְּשׁוּבָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִקְצַפְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמִדְבָּר לְמַן הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יָצְאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד בְּאֶחָם עַד הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם עִם ה'.

*Remember, do not forget how you infuriated the Lord your God in the wilderness; from the time that he took you out of Egypt until your coming to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord!*

**Leaving** Egypt and **coming** into the Land is the narrative arc of the Torah; this is just one of several references. Israel's **departure** from Egypt was the founding moment of the nation. Israel's **arrival** in the Land forty years later is the culminating moment of the journey.

### 3. Moses Describes Himself as Unable to **Leave** and **Return**

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם בֶּן מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אֲנִכִּי הַיּוֹם לֹא אוּכַל עוֹד לֵצֵאת וּלְבֹא וְה' אָמַר אֵלַי לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה.

*He said to them: A hundred and twenty years old am I today; I am no longer able to go out and to come in, and God has said to me: you are not to cross over this Jordan!*

What does Moses mean here by **go out and come in**? Perhaps it is just a simple figure of speech for *going about my daily life*. According to Rashi though, this is Moses declaring that he was no longer permitted to function as political or spiritual leader because he had already transferred the mantle to Joshua. According to Ibn Ezra, Moses is saying that he can no longer function as a military leader. Whether political, spiritual, or military, the expression **לֵצֵאת וּלְבֹא** pertains to the external sphere of his life. In the broadest metaphorical sense, he is saying, *I can no longer move freely about the world. I am not permitted to cross the Jordan with you on your journey to the Land.*

### Deut. 28: **לֵבֹא וּלְצֵאת** - **Coming and Going**

#### 1. Noah. (Gen. 7:1, 8:15-16)

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לְנֹחַ: בֹּא אַתָּה וְכָל בֵּיתְךָ אֶל הַתֵּבָה כִּי אֲתִידָבָר אֵלַיִתִּי צְדִיק לְפָנַי בְּדוֹר הַזֶּה... וַיִּדְבֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל נֹחַ לֵאמֹר: צֵא מִן הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּבְנֶיךָ וְנִשְׁי בְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ.

*God said to Noah: Come, you and all your household, into the ark! For you I have seen as righteous before me in this generation.... God spoke to Noah, saying: Go out of the ark, you and your wife, your sons and your sons' wives with you.*

Noah **enters** the ark, stays there for the duration of the Flood and its initial aftermath, and then **leaves**. The ark is a large structure, but we imagine Noah's sense of confinement. The ark shelters Noah and enables him and his family to survive as the old world vanishes and a new world emerges. The ark is a home. Albeit a temporary one.

#### 2. The Hebrew Slave. (Exod. 21:3)

אִם בְּגֵפוֹ יָבֹא בְּגֵפוֹ יֵצֵא אִם בְּעַל אִשָּׁה הוּא יֵצֵא אִשְׁתּוֹ עִמּוֹ.  
*If he came by himself, he is to go out by himself; if he was the spouse of a wife, his wife is to go out with him.*

The slave **enters** the private space of the master when his term begins and **exits** that space when his term ends<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When the slave declares that he does not want to go free at the end of his term, the Torah commands that his ear shall be pierced,

(Exod. 21:6) presumably as a sign of his permanent servitude. Where does that piercing take place? At the doorway, or the

whether that space is inside the home outside in the field. Until his emancipation he is part of the master's household and subject to his control, except on Shabbat.

### 3. Moses and Aaron Inaugurate the Sanctuary. (Lev. 9:23)

וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּצְאוּ וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת הָעָם וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד  
ה' אֶל כָּל הָעָם.

*Now Moses and Aaron had entered the Tent of Appointment; they came out and they blessed the people, and the Glory of God was seen by the entire people.*

ENTER

EXIT

For the entire week of the inauguration, the kohanim were to reside inside the sanctuary zone, and not leave. While inside the Tent of Meeting, they performed all of the sacrifices necessary for the inauguration, but they were to remain sequestered in the sacred space, near the entrance. Only on the eighth day, once the ceremonies concluded, would they be able to *exit*. On the eighth day itself, Moses and Aaron *enter* the sacred area. *Why? According to one midrash, it is for Moses to give Aaron a last-minute tutorial on how to offer incense. According to another midrash, it is to enable Aaron to ask God for forgiveness for his role in the Golden Calf incident.* All of the biblical examples demonstrate to us that there is indeed a difference between *לְבֹא-לְצֵאת*-going and coming (Psalm 121) and *לְבֹא*-coming and going (Deut. 28) In all the cases of *לְבֹא*, the focus is on the journey, movement, going forth into the world. In all of the cases of the *לְבֹא*, the focus is on residing, dwelling, or staying in one defined space. To summarize:

Psalm 121 <i>לְבֹא</i> -Going and coming	Deut. 28 <i>לְבֹא</i> -Coming and Going
To go on a journey.	To reside in a home/space.
Exodus; Abraham; Moses as warrior.	Noah; the Slave; Aaron (and Moses) as Priest.
The open space: the road from Haran, the desert, the battlefield.	The restricted space: the ark, the master's household, the sanctuary.
The desire for to be guarded and protected.	The desire for blessing and tranquility.
<i>May God guard your going: into the dangerous world.</i>	<i>Blessed be you in your coming in: into the blessed and tranquil home.</i>
<i>May God guard you coming in: back into the blessed and tranquil home.</i>	<i>blessed be you, in your going out: into the dangerous world.</i>

**Analogy:** Many of us have had the experience of sending our kids to Israel for short trips or year-long programs. We

mezuzah, the door post. Why? Because it is the symbolic boundary of his entry under the control of his master and the exit to freedom that he himself declined to take.

have stood at the airport with them as the agents screen their identities and tag their luggage. The last time we see them is when they are about to go through security. They are going on their journey, and we pray that they will return safely. We wonder how they will be transformed. **That is the Psalm 121 moment: May God guard your going (forth)...and coming (back).** But we have also had the opposite experience. We have stood at the entrances to our homes as they arrive for a visit. We welcome them with open arms. We hug them and kiss them and don't want to let them out of our sight. **That is the Deut. 28 moment: Blessed be you when you come and (we-want-you-to-stay-awhile) blessed be you when you go out (and return).** When we dispatch our children to their schools, journeys, or regular lives, we are living in **Psalm 121**, praying for their safety out there in the world. When we receive them back, we are living in **Deut. 28**, praying for the tranquility of their stay at home.



**Journey and Home - Two Metaphors of Life:** Both the prayer of **Psalm 121** and the blessing of **Deut. 28** resonate deeply with us. **Psalm 121** appeals to God to be with us through all the vicissitudes of life. It reassures us that God, *maker of heaven and earth*, (121:2) *Creator of the vast open space of the universe*, will always guard and protect us wherever we go. God, *the wondrous wakeful watchman*, will always guard us, as if he is *the shadow of our right hand* (121:5) throughout *the journey of our lives*. The blessing of **Deut. 28** on the other hand, addresses us in the spaces where we live. Whether we live in the city or in the country, *בְּעִיר וּבְשָׂדֶה*, (Deut. 28:3) the blessings of family and fertility, *the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your land, and the fruit of your animals, the offspring of your cattle and the fecundity of your sheep, your basket and your kneading-bowl* (Deut. 28:4-5) **all pertain to the private domain of a person's life.** The home-haven is where we are formed as individuals and where our story begins. **Home is a metaphor for Life. We enter life and we exit life.** To be blessed when we come in and when we go out not only means that our homes should fortify us and nourish us as we make our way into the world, but that we should be blessed throughout the entire sojourn of our lives.

### SHABBAT SHALOM!

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by the Mitnick, Hale, and Leber families to commemorate the 4th Yahrzeit of Joshua Mitnick, z"l.

We mark 708 days of captivity for the hostages this Shabbat. We pray for their return and an end to the war. May God shield Israel, protect the IDF, heal the wounded, comfort the bereaved, and spare innocents from suffering.