



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

DISTRIBUTION DATE:

TUESDAY JUNE 8, 2010 / כו" סיון

PARSHA:

KORACH / קרח

SERMON TITLE:

Do we really need a Cadillac?

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.

KORACH

Do we really need a Cadillac?

At a funeral of an elderly woman, her husband of many years got up to speak.

In this eulogy, the husband related how he was once speeding excessively with his wife in the car. A policeman pulled them over. His dear departed wife, who had been sitting next to him in the passenger seat, turned to the police officer and said: "Please give him a ticket. He deserves it. I always yell at him to drive carefully and he never listens to me. But you finally got him! So give him a big ticket so he'll learn for next time."

The police officer ordered him to step out of the car. Only then did he ask him: "Tell me—is she always like that?" The husband said yes. So the police officer said to him, "If so, you're free to go—you already got your punishment."

And the husband concluded, "This is the first time I had the guts to tell this story!"

There was a study last year in which they tried to find out which major U.S. city had the best and worst drivers. I don't remember which city was the best, but we can all imagine which city was the worst on the list: New York.

My friends: By looking into the Torah, as we must always do, we can even learn how one must drive.

Now, in the era of the Bible and the Prophets, people had three ways of traveling: horses, camels and donkeys.

Looking at all three, without a doubt the donkey moves the slowest. But between the camel and the horse, which goes faster? I once heard that some camels can actually sprint at 40 miles an hour—which is about the same top speed of horses.

So in those days, people who wanted to get to their destinations quickly would ride horses or camels. In contrast, those who weren't in such a rush, or who couldn't afford the prices at Avis Rent a Horse, would ride on donkeys.

When we examine the Torah to see how our Patriarchs traveled, we discover something interesting: Not a single one rode on a horse.

Camels, however, were more common: Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, took a caravan of camels when he traveled to find a mate for Yitzchak, and it's no surprise that he traveled quickly—at that point, Yitzchak was no young man. He was 40

years old, and they needed to find him a wife as soon as possible. That's why Eliezer took the fastest vehicle available.

But when one wants to know what mode of transportation was used by the greatest Jews in history, there are only a few cases in the Torah in which it is specified what mode of transportation was used.

The first example we read in the Torah is Avraham Avinu, our Patriarch Abraham. In the story of the Akeidah, the Binding of Yitzchak, we are told, "And Avraham woke up in the morning and harnessed his donkey." (Genesis 22:3).

Now, Avraham was a wealthy man and he very easily could have gotten himself a horse—especially since the Torah tells us that he pushed to take care of the Akeidah as soon as possible. That's why he got up early in the morning. Still, he used a donkey.

The second example in the Torah of traveling from Point A to Point B is Moshe Rabbeinu. When G-d told Moshe, who was then in the land of Midyan, to travel to Egypt to take the Jewish Nation out, we are told: "And Moshe took his wife and his sons and he rode them on the donkey" (Shmos 4:20).

Even Moshe Rabbeinu himself, for whatever reason, used a donkey to get to Egypt. This is strange enough that even the Talmud (Tractate Megilah 9a) tells us that the 72 Sages commissioned by King Ptolemy to translate the Torah to Greek translated the phrase "on the donkey" as "on transportation that carries humans"—because, as Rashi explains, they didn't want the king to think that Moshe, the great master of the Jews, didn't have a horse or camel.

So Moshe Rabbeinu chose to put his family on a donkey. And in our Parshah, in the fight with Korach, Moshe turns to G-d and says, "Don't turn to their offering"—don't listen to them. Why? Because "I have not taken one donkey from them." In other words, I have not arrogated any wealth or affluence for myself from the Jewish Nation, some of whom are now complaining that I have hoarded power and influence for myself—even the donkey I used to transport my family to Egypt from Midyan was not taken from them. I paid for it myself!

And finally, the most important person in Jewish history, for whom we are waiting with sore eyes for 2,000 years, the Moshiach, is described by the Prophet Zecharyah as arriving on a donkey. "Behold, your king shall come to you. He is just and victorious; humble, and riding a donkey..." (In a side lesson, this teaches us that one should travel a little slower, like a donkey, not running like a horse.)

Now, there is a deep reason why all three used donkeys and not more dignified means of transportation like horses or camels.

In 1986, a group of Lubavitcher Chasidim finally bought the Rebbe a new car.

To preface: Since the Rebbe would frequently pay his respects at the resting place of his father-in-law, the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe in Queens, his aides had a car

that was reserved for the Rebbe. It was a plain grey 1973 Cadillac. Obviously, it was a little old and had been in the shop quite a few times. That's why many Chasidim wanted to buy the Rebbe a new car, but the Rebbe turned down the offer time and time again.

So finally, in 1986, a Chosid decided to buy the Rebbe a brand new Cadillac and park it in front of 770 Eastern Parkway. He figured that when the Rebbe would see that it was already there, bought and paid for, he wouldn't refuse it and would get into the car.

When the new car was parked in front of "770," the yeshivah students were very excited, examining it from all sides and waiting with bated breath to see how the Rebbe would react to the new car.

The Rebbe stepped out of his office and approached the car, and the Rebbe's aide told the Rebbe that this is the new car that so-and-so donated. The Rebbe replied: Tell him that I thank him, but "He who hates gifts shall live," the Rebbe concluded, quoting the Sages. The Rebbe then instructed that the new car be returned, saying that he would continue using the old car.

It took several minutes until the old car could be brought back, and the Rebbe was not too happy about this incident.

Two months later, the Rebbe mentioned the episode at one of his farbrengens, saying that they had tried to convince him to accept a new car since the upholstery of the seating was worn out and it was not nice—but he didn't need the new car. On the contrary—with the old car, the Rebbe explained, he had already accomplished many important things and he would continue to do so.

But what really was the reason the Rebbe didn't want a new car? The answer may be found in the verse about Moshiach: "... humble, and riding a donkey"—on which Rashi says, "Riding on a donkey is a sign of humility."

The Rebbe explained that both Moshe Rabbeinu and Moshiach are associated with donkeys because of their humility. And for that reason, we might say that that's why the Rebbe didn't want a new car either.

The lesson for us is that we don't need to have it all. We don't need the fastest horse, the strongest camel, or the fastest car or biggest house. After all, even a humble donkey can bring about the greatest thing to ever happen to mankind: the coming of Moshiach. May we merit his coming speedily in our days, amen!

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman אהרן בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.