

אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים ביד משה ואהרן (לג:א)

“These are the journeys of the children of Israel, by which they went forth out the land of Egypt, by their hosts under the hand of Moshe and Aaron.” (33:1)

Why the need to acknowledge Moshe and Aaron’s involvement? Is this not obvious?

The Magid of Dubnow (Rabbi Yaakov Kranz 1741-1804) explains through a parable. This can be compared to an aide to the king. When the prince behaved unbecomingly and continued to commit offenses, it was the king’s admiration of his aide and the aide’s requests for forgiveness that allowed the prince to be acquitted by the king time and time again. Upon realizing this dependency on the aide’s intervention, the aide himself asked the king to be removed from his position, in hope that the son would understand that he could no longer count on his father’s protection and would change his actions.

Similarly, the Israelites sinned constantly in the desert, relying on that Moshe and Aaron would pray for their atonement, regardless of their continued sinning. For this reason, Moshe requested from G-d to “forgive their sin and if not, please blot me out of Your Book which you have written.” (Shemot 32:32) In other words, Moshe requests to be excused from his position so that the Israelites will no longer rely on him to intervene on their behalf and will understand the need to refrain from sin. One of the reasons for the many wanderings in the forty years was because of the Israelite’s complaints against Moshe and G-d. Had these complaints not transpired, these many stops in the desert would not have been necessary. Therefore: “These are the journeys of the children of Israel...under the hand of Moshe and Aaron.” The Israelites depended on their leaders to pray to G-d for atonement and did not control themselves.

Shabbat Shalom