

SHEMOS – 5774
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Before seeing the Sneh (burning bush) the Torah tells us (3:1) that “*Vayinhag et Hatzon Achar HaMidbar*” that Moshe leads his flock **achar** of the desert. What exactly does “achar of the desert” mean- is a dispute among the commentators.

R'Saadia Gaon (882-942 Babylonia) understands the text as denoting a specific area-at the far end of the desert- where the Sneh was located. Chizkuni (13th Century, R' Chizkia ben Ma'no'ach, of Northern France) states that **achar** teaches us that Moshe took his flock just beyond the desert, for it was there that he was able to find vegetation for his sheep. A third commentator, Seforno (1475-1550 Italy) does not believe that **achar** refers to a physical place, but rather it is telling us that Moshe goes far away from civilization and distraction for only then can he properly meditate before encountering G-d. Seforno adds, that the Torah is illustrating why Moshe was suitably prepared for that encounter with HaShem.

Rashi, (R' Shlomo Yizchaki, Feb 22, 1040- July 13, 1105, Northern France) offers an entirely different perspective to the question of **achar HaMidbar**. According to Rashi, Moshe took his flock beyond (**achar**) the desert to graze his sheep. It was there, in no-man's land, land owned by no one, that Moshe felt he had the right to graze his flock, knowing that his animals would steal from no one.

Similarly, we find by the Akeidat Yitzchak, (Bereishit 22:13) when the Malach (angel) of HaShem tell Avraham not to sacrifice Yitzchak, Avraham sees a ram caught in the thicket. There too, the Torah states that ram was from **achar**, it was beyond, meaning in the sense that it belonged to no one. Being ownerless, Avraham felt he could take it and sacrifice it in place of Yitzhak.

An important message emerges from these events. One could easily imagine that at a moment of religious experience, one could use whatever means at his disposal when connecting with HKB'H (HaKadosh Baruch Hu-the Lord). After all, shouldn't one be able to expropriate property or belongings from anyone if it is needed in the service of HaShem? The word **achar** powerfully rejects this idea. The way to reaching out to HaShem involves extreme sensitivity to our fellow person. In a deeply spiritual moment, both Moshe and Avraham are careful not to interact with G-d by taking that which belongs to another. Our Sages later formulated this into Halacha, stating that “*Mitzvah HaBa'a B'aveirah- Aveirah*”, A Mitzvah that is performed through an act of an Aveirah (sin) - ultimately remains a sin and no credit is given for the performance of that Mitzvah.

Many of us are guilty of overlooking the sensitivity of others in our eagerness to perform our Mitzvot. We may brush, and occasionally push others aside in our haste “make the Minyan”, for a Kaddish, or a Kedusha. We may enter a Sukkah built for patrons of a restaurant and eat our own sandwich rationalizing that to perform a Mitzvah we need not ask permission. In a Bet Midrash we may pick up a personal sefer that looks interesting and read it without requesting permission, etc.-all this, in the name of doing a Mitzvah that supposedly brings us closer to HaShem. Moshe, even before becoming Moshe Rabbeinu teaches us- *Lo Zu HaDerech*. This is not what HaShem expects of us.