

From:

The Jewish Advocate

The Jewish Advocate, founded in 1902, is the oldest continually-circulated English-language Jewish newspaper in the United States.

Based in downtown Boston, in the former *Boston Post* daily newspaper building (which, in its cellars four stories underground, still contains the century-old pulleys-and-lifts system equipment for the publishing presses of those days) overlooking what was known in the late 1800's and early 1900's as "newspaper row", The Jewish Advocate has published weekly every week since its founding over one hundred years ago. The paper is the primary Jewish newspaper for the Greater Boston and Eastern Massachusetts metropolitan area, and for much of New England, with subscribers in all 50 states and 14 foreign countries.

The Point of Our Journey
Parshah Matos-Masei
by
Rabbi Yitzhak Aharon Korff
Zv'hil - Mezbuz Rebbe

Included in this week's double Parshah is an enumeration of the succession of wanderings undergone by the Israelites during their 40 years of nomadic life in the wilderness. The Torah lays out the names of their camping places in full, and at first glance, perhaps excessive detail. This point is in fact taken up by Rashi, who tries to explain this detailed catalogue of place-names as a manifesto of G-d's kindness. In 38 years, states Rashi, the Israelites made only 20 journeys, and thus their wanderings, though they were punishment for sin, were measured into easy stages.

Furthermore, the purpose and the effect of these wanderings was to rehabilitate the people, morally and spiritually, to prepare them to enter the Holy Land in purity and in strength. It is thus in grateful recognition of this spiritual recovery that each stage of the journey is so lovingly named.

Rashi quotes in this context an analogy from the Midrash Tanchumah of a king who took his sick son on a journey to recover from his illness. After the son had been cured, and as they were returning home, the father pointed out every stopping place on their outward journey. For him, these places signified stages in his son's journey to health, and were invested with an aura of gratitude and love.

In the same way, the names of the camping sites in our Parshah are no mere tedious list, but a loving record of recovery.

Yet a second glance reveals a glaring omission, for the Parshah tells us "they journeyed from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai, and they journeyed from the wilderness of Sinai and camped in Kivros-HaTa'avoh." It was at Sinai that we received the Torah, and the Parshah does not see fit to mention so significant an event here as the very giving of the Torah, and instead simply maintains its unbroken list of journeys and encampments. Why?

Perhaps this is to teach us that we are to conduct ourselves on each and every day, in each and every encampment, as having just received the Torah. If we consider the Torah merely as something given to us many years ago, we might come to treat it less enthusiastically than we should.

A similar explanation is given for one reason why the Torah does not specifically tell us when the Torah was given, but rather tells us that Shovuos, when we celebrate the receipt of the Torah at Mount Sinai, is 50 days from Pesach, building our anticipation. Thus do we refer to Shovuos as "zman matan Toroseinu," the time of the giving of the Torah, for we must receive the Torah each and every day.

The concept behind receiving the Torah every day is rooted in the words of the Shema, that "thou shalt teach them diligently to your children."

We cannot teach if we do not receive and learn, and thus inherent in fulfilling the commandment of passing this on to our children is the requirement that we receive it, learn it and practice it ourselves.

The story is told of Friedrich Wilhelm, the King of Prussia, who once asked his chaplain to prove in one word the truth of religion. "Your Majesty," the chaplain replied, "Jews." Jews, individually and collectively, are the embodiment of a long and continuous history of religious ideas and teachings.

It is a unique thing to be a Jew, and it is this unique heritage, rooted in the Torah and not just in culture, that must be passed on to our children. Just as the journeys and wanderings of the Jewish nation to achieve their spiritual and moral rehabilitation was long and difficult, so, too, the proper education of a child is a long process.

And ultimately, we must remember that we are all Bnei Yisroel, all the Children of Israel, and our education, our receipt of the Torah and our teaching of it, never ends until we come to the end of our journey and our last encampment.

The Rebbe is Chaplain of the City of Boston, and spiritual leader of the Zvhil - Mezbuz Beis Medrash, Cong. Bnai Jacob of Boston and Newton. www.Rebbe.org Info@Rebbe.org