

Spotlight on...Schlepping

Background:

Matot-Masei is the longest double parsha in the Torah. Wowza! Masei opens with a long list of all of the 42 places that the Israelites traveled to in the desert. Whenever the Torah devotes a lot of space to something we have to ask why - especially when it seems that the information is redundant. So why does the Torah take 49 pesukim to list the 42 journeys in the desert? What purpose does this list serve?

Rashi and Seforno each provide an answer to this question. Rashi answers that the purpose of this list is to show everyone Hashem's chesed towards the Israelites. If a person didn't see this list they would think that Hashem punished the Israelites with having to spend an extra 38 years schlepping around the desert without a chance to rest. So, this list teaches us that Hashem showed chesed to the Israelites by only making them travel 20 times in 38 years (the rest of the 42 trips were before the sin of the spies, which caused them to have to be punished by spending 40 years in the desert.) They got to spend most of their time resting.

Like Rashi, Seforno says that this list comes to teach us something positive. However, it is a positive lesson about the Israelites, not about Hashem. Hashem listed all 42 journeys to praise the Israelites, because they were willing to follow Hashem on these travels throughout a barren desert land.

Questions:

1. Rashi and Seforno both recognize that the 40 year journey through the desert was stressful for the Israelites. What was the source of stress according to each opinion?
2. Why does Rashi think that Hashem's kindness to the people is the most important feature? Why does the Seforno think that the people's kindness to Hashem is the most important? What is the significance of each of these positions?
3. Think about the relationships that you have with other people in your life. In which of these relationships are you like Hashem? In which are you like the Israelites? How do you show kindness to the other person?