

Parashat Matot-Masei 5780, Rabbi James Proops

A relatively new addition to our family's collection of children's books is the wonderfully graphic and beautifully illustrated "The Desert Diary" by Gadi Pollack. The book details the many journeys of Bnei Yisrael in the Midbar through the eyes of Peduel Ben Shalem, a 10 year old boy from Shevet Yehudah. It takes the form of a journal, each entry including a descriptive insight into what it would have been like to be part of Bnei Yisrael throughout their time in the Midbar. "What begins as a child's diary of day-to-day life in Kadesh Barne'a continues with a young man's account of the wondrous miracles and challenging travails of the years in the Wilderness and ends with a mature man's anticipations as the Chosen Nation stood on the threshold of our promised Land." When reading through the book with my children and looking at the inspired illustrations, what really resonated was trying to see the journeys of Bnei Yisrael through the eyes of an individual. Allowing our imagination to ponder what it would have been like to be part of Bnei Yisrael at that auspicious time. To reflect on how certain instances in the midbar would have made us feel and acted as a result. It is a wonderful educational tool that really opens up the Torah and history of our People.

It is fascinating to note that the inspiration for this project came from a pasuk in the second of our two *parashiot*, Parashat Masei. The verse states, "וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה" וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה לְמַסְעֵיהֶם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם לְמַסְעֵיהֶם עַל־פִּי ה' Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journey at the bidding of Hashem..." (33:2). It is striking that the pasuk uses the word "וַיִּכְתֹּב" - And he wrote". What was it that Moshe was writing? Why and when did he physically write about the journeys specifically?

The Ohr HaChaim explains that the Torah is imparting to us important information as to how and when Moshe wrote down the details of the journeys in the *Midbar*. Rather than writing them all down in one day, Moshe kept a written record of their travels and encampments as they occurred. In essence Moshe kept a diary from the time that they left *Mitzrayim* all the way up until they arrived at *Arvot Moav*. The Ohr HaChaim continues that God told Moshe to include all his private notes from his journal in the text of the Torah.

The question can still be asked however, why was it necessary for Moshe to write things down as they happened and not just a review at the end? We can suggest that from the fact that Moshe kept a diary, recording that which took place at each stop, highlights to us how we should act and relate to our own 'journeys' through life. One can view the various episodes and 'stops along the way' as simply stepping stones, hurdles or mere scenery as we strive towards our destination. Or we can pause, reflect and learn from each and every life experience, turning our many journeys from just stopping points to transformative experiences. From Moshe keeping a diary we learn how important it is to take note of every situation and place we find ourselves and allow those experiences to impact us for the better.

It is also suggested that the opening *pasukim* of the *parasha* indicate for us what we should be paying attention to, as we each navigate our personal journey through life. The opening pasuk states that Bnei Yisrael went forth... “בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן” - under the hand of Moshe and Aharon”. We have to recognize who is accompanying us on our journeys. What impact and influence do they have and how can I ensure that I utilize and appreciate these relationships, whether with family, friends and mentors. The next pasuk states that the journeys were embarked upon על־פִּי ה' - according to the word of God”, which highlights the importance of recognizing that all our travels, including those celebrated and those depaired, are mandated by Hashem. Our lives are a series of spiritual journeys, through which we must strive to grow at every opportunity. Finally the pasuk ends לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם - according to their goings forth”. The sublet message of this word is that every journey upon which we find ourselves is leading us in the same direction. We are born with a unique purpose and mission and our lives are filled with journeys and stops to help us achieve it.

Right now we are all at a strange and unprecedented 'stop along the way', prevented from living life as we have been accustomed. Let us follow the example of Moshe to use this 'stop' as an opportunity to appreciate those around us who, to contemplate that this is an opportunity for spiritual growth and recognize that this

is part of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's plan to enable us all to fulfil our God given potential.

Shabbat Shalom