

Rabbi Noah Arnow
Kol Rinah
Parashat Matot-Masei
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According to an April AAA survey, more than one-third of Americans (35 percent) are planning to take a family vacation of 50 miles or more away from home involving two or more immediate family members in the next 12 months.

At Kol Rinah, it seems many of our congregants were away earlier this week, when we didn't make minyan Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday mornings. Ahem.

We may or may not go on vacations, but we all are on journeys. We are on journeys together—our congregation is figuring out where we are going, geographically, and spiritually.

Our nation is on a journey as it sorts out its identity this presidential election year, and as we do every four years.

We are on journeys with our families. Today we celebrated milestones on the journeys of Don and Betty Siegel, and Mitch and Janice Shenker, in their marriages.

And we also celebrated an early milestone on the journey of Rachel and Russell Gottlieb's family, and a major early milestone, bestowing a Jewish name, on their beautiful new baby girl Sophia Beth, Sarai Bracha.

Today is also a milestone, a first Shabbat for Rabbi Scott Shafrin as a rabbi of Kol Rinah.

Us here today will remember this moment, this milestone for many different reasons, for many different journeys.

What are some of the different journeys you are on—individually, and as part of different groups?

Each of us is on a journey of becoming who we are, and who we will be.

We are always becoming who we are, and God is the "lure," the force, towards which we reach and strive to become the next version of ourselves, the spirit propelling us on our journeys of becoming," as Rabbi Brad Artson, our scholar-in-residence here about a year and half ago describes in his book, God of Becoming and Relationship.

Most of chapter thirty-three of Numbers, the beginning of parashat Masei, recounts the Israelites' wilderness journey. For example, *The Israelites set out from Rameses and encamped at Succoth. They set out from Succoth and encamped at Etham, which is at the edge of the wilderness* (Num. 33:5-6). The text gives each departure and arrival—set out from X, they arrived at Y. Perhaps it gives a detail about the place—what's there, what it's near, what happened there, and then, the next departure and arrival: they set out from Y and arrived at Z.

The Torah doesn't actually provide a count of the number of places, but if you count the places they stop—the stations, not the legs of the journey, you find there are forty-two. (I'll let you ponder why the number is not provided, and what that suggests about how we understand and can see our journeys while we're on them, or even after we have finished them.)

In addition to being "the answer" in the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, forty-two is not a random Jewish number.

The number actually appears explicitly in chapter 35 of Numbers. Does anyone remember the context?

It's in the section about Levitical cities. The Levites were not assigned land in the land of Israel like the other tribes; they are to receive a tithe from everyone else, so they don't need to grow much food, are dedicated to serving the ritual needs of the community, and in this parasha are given forty-two cities (and an additional six to which a person who kills by accident may flee to). So what is the connection between these two forty-two's?

"Corresponding to the forty-two places where the Israelites camped, in each of which they were strangers, thus the Levites were given forty-two cities, since they were not given a portion in the land of Israel."

כלי יקר במדבר פרשת מסעי פרק לה פסוק ו

(ו) ארבעים ושתים עיר. כנגד ארבעים ושתים חניות שישראל חנו בהם והיו בכולם כגרים כך נתנו ללוים שלא היה להם חלק בארץ ארבעים ושתים עיר.

This is how it is explained by one Torah commentator, my favorite, by the way, the Keli Yakar, the seventeenth century Rabbi Shelomo Ephraim of Luntschitz. (I'll read it again.)

What the Keli Yakar is suggesting, I think, is that the Israelites were constantly strangers during their travels, and never at home. All the other tribes finally got homes in the land of Israel, and so did the Levites, in an amount corresponding precisely to the count of the places in which they were strangers in their wanderings.

Being on a journey comes at a cost, and what we want and need after the journey is to settle down, proportionate to the dislocation, anomy, loneliness, alienation, and length of the journey.

Being on a journey is critical; but resting while on that journey—forty-two times, and eventually settling down, and perhaps being on a different kind of journey, is ok and healthy.

I asked you earlier to consider the journeys you are on, individually, and as part of a collective.

Are you on a leg of the journey, moving now? Or are you at a station, camped, until the next leg? Where are you in the journey—the beginning, middle, or end? Do you know? How?

What journeys are you resting and recovering from? What journeys have you not yet begun?

In one sense, we at Kol Rinah are settling down after a journey searching for a new director of our Religious School, and an assistant rabbi. I, for one, am breathing a big sigh of relief that Rabbi Shafrin is here with us, a journey that began in January when he applied for the position.

But we, and I, also know that our journey together as a congregation with Rabbi Shafrin and his family is only just beginning.

Rabbi Shafrin, Scott, may Kol Rinah's journey together with you be infused with sacred purpose, and we be propelled forward by our care for each other, our dreams for our children and our hopes for our future, and the holy insistence that in and through relationship, we will become who we are meant to be.

Shabbat shalom.