

Our Story is Not Over

This week we conclude the Book of Numbers by reading a double Torah portion, *Matot* and *Mas'ei* (“Tribes” and “Journeys” 30:2 - 36:13). The portions contain the revelation of several *mitzvot*, including those dealing with vows, the creation of Levitical cities and towns of refuge, laws dealing with capital punishment, and an update of the law of inheritance. Now, it is hardly unusual for there to be commandments in a Torah portion. However, the last verses of the Book of Numbers alert us to the fact that these revealed *mitzvot* were not given at Mount Sinai:

אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוֹת וְהַמְשָׁפָטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב עַל יַרְדֵּן יֶרִיחוֹ:

*These are the mitzvot and regulations that Adonai
commanded at the hand of Moses to the Children of Israel
on the plains of Moav along the Jordan near Jericho.*

Note that contrary to the post-Biblical teaching in many traditional rabbinic sources that the entire Torah and its commentary (ie. the “Oral Torah,” and the basis of the Mishnah) were miraculously revealed at Mount Sinai, the Torah itself contains a clear evolution of the commandments and our relationship to God, both before, during, and after Sinai.

That the laws and traditions of our people continued to evolve over time is not necessarily a challenge to those who maintain a cherished view of a single revelation at Sinai. The Torah's message simply confirms that which we know from history and have experienced in our everyday lives: namely, that the story of our people is ongoing. The fact is that our Jewish family and ancestors faced countless changes and challenges during our 4,000 years and in every generation we creatively found noble responses to survive and thrive.

Yes, there was an inspirational revelation at Mount Sinai. And our ancestors before that time, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel and Leah had revelatory experiences that established the foundation of our family and faith. After Sinai, during the 40 years in the wilderness, on the plains of Moav and for the 1,200 years we were in the Land of Israel, we continued to deepen our understanding and relationship with God. The Books of the Prophets and Writings are magisterial records of the evolution and growth of our faith. Indeed, for the past 2,000 years of exile from Israel and then a miraculous ingathering of our people for the recreation of the modern State of Israel, we have faithfully maintained our

covenant with God and, in turn, we have gleaned inspired wisdom from our spiritual and intellectual contemplation of God.

The journeys of the tribes of Israel is story that is not over. It did not end at Sinai. It did not end when we entered the Promised Land. It did not end when we were exiled. It did not end during the centuries of oppression, pogroms, or even a Holocaust. And it will not end with us.

Let us continue to learn the lessons of our extraordinary story and realize the importance for each of us to contribute to the blessed chapters yet to unfold.

B'vrakhah, With Blessings

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