

(Dvar Torah continued from the front page...)

For the immediate gratification crowd, maybe a jump right into the next exciting part of the journey would read more dramatically. Yet, our reading of the Torah often exhorts us to be more intentional and mindful in our lives. Delayed gratification is good! Rashi shares a penetrating insight into why this is. He first answers that the reason all these stops were listed was because in God's benevolence, God didn't want the reader to think that God made them journey without any cessation. After some Rashi arithmetic for how that works, Rashi then quotes a *Midrash* (*Tanchuma 4:10:3*) that shares a different thought:

"R. Tanchuma gave another explanation of it (of the question why these stages are here recorded). A parable! It may be compared to the case of a king whose son was ill and whom he took to a distant place to cure him. When they returned home the father began to enumerate all the stages, saying to him, "Here we slept, here we caught cold, here you had the headache, etc."

When I read this *Midrash*, I immediately picture a child at the end of a long day, not wanting to go to sleep, asking a parent or grandparent to tell them **that** story again. You know, the one they have heard already hundreds of times. God was with the Israelites every step of the way on this desert journey yet here at the end of it, God wants to make sure that the Israelites understand what it took to get them here. This is the spot where we faced this enemy. This is where you shined as a leader, Moshe. To simply jump into the next part of this story would be a disservice and a cheapening to that which got them there

I think of this dynamic often in our lives that sometimes operate at hyper speed. How often are we itching to get to that next stage? It is only human of course. To me though, one of the messages of the end of Bamidbar is the power of the story and that sometimes it can be more useful to look backward. It can be incredibly edifying to immerse ourselves in the ups and downs of whatever journeys we are on. That way, once we reach our promised land, we can do so with the full understanding of the steps that brought us there, those that brought us to our lowest lows and those that brought us to our highest heights.



Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center
Conservative Yeshiva

TORAH SPARKS

Matot-Masei

July 18, 2020 | Tammuz 26 5780

Annual I (Numbers 30:2-36:13) Etz Hayyim, p. 941
Triennial I (Numbers 30:2-31:54) Etz Hayyim, p. 941
Haftarah I (Jeremiah 2:4-28, 3:4) Etz Hayyim, p. 973

It's All About the Journey

Rabbi Adir Yalkut, Rabbi in Residence at Temple Israel Center in White Plains,
CY Student Alumnus, 2010, 2013-2014

As we near the end of the reading of the book of *Bamidbar* this Shabbat, we might expect it to end with a flourish. With events like the ground opening up to swallow rebels, birds falling from the sky, and a spy mission almost gone horribly wrong, shouldn't the Torah give us the world's first season ending cliffhanger? Yet, what we are treated to reads as the first ever Torah inspired TripTik.

In *Parshat Masei*, the latter of the two portions we read this week, beginning with chapter 33:3, we read 47 verses worth of stops on the road. We start at Ramses and end at the Jordan near Jericho, where Moses prepares to give God's instruction on finally taking possession of the land. This is the moment the people have been waiting for. They are on the cusp of the culmination of this arduous journey that has been hindered nearly every step of the way. So, why then do we need an explicit accounting of each moment on this trip? Was it not enough to have lived it?!

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(Dvar Torah continued on the back page...)

D'var Haftarah: Mend Your Society

Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, From the Archives

This week's Haftarah is the second of the three haftarot of desolation that precede Tisha b'Av – the fast marking the destruction of the first and second Temples. The choice of these haftarot prompts a heightened sense of awareness of the Jewish attitude toward these monumental tragedies. The Jewish focus seems to be less on the tragedy itself and more on the perceived reasons for the tragedy.

This week's haftarah is literally a continuation of last week's haftarah. Last week, we read the first chapter of the book of Jeremiah, with Jeremiah's initiation as a prophet and God's warning of the dire consequences of the nation linking its fate to Egypt when its fatal destruction was likely to come from its northern enemy, the Babylonians. In true rabbinic fashion, the sages were unwilling to end even a haftarah of desolation on a bitter note, so they incorporated at the end of last week's message of rebuke, the positive message found at the beginning of the second chapter which contains this week's haftarah even though it is at odds with what precedes it: "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Go proclaim to Jerusalem: Thus said the Lord: I accounted to your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride – how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of His harvest, all who ate of it were held guilty; disaster befell them – declares the Lord.'" (Jeremiah 2:1-3) The reader is thus comforted in his or her knowledge that despite whatever failings the nation might have, still, God remembers the loyalty and fealty of Israel's youth when He brought them out of Egypt and they followed Him loyally into the desert as an act of faith.

The inclusion of these verses at the end of last week's message leaves its imprimatur on this week's haftarah. Without this comforting message at its beginning, the harshness of this week's message remains untempered in its severity. Jeremiah accuses the people of abandoning God (2:4;8;17;19), falsely prophesying in the name of Baal (8), idolatry (13,20,23,25,27,28), social injustice (34), and false dependence on foreign nations (18.25.36) The only consolation seems to be that the sages chose Jeremiah's indictment rather than that of Ezekiel who also challenged the people for their sins. Jeremiah attributed the people's sins to foolishness. Ezekiel accused them of open rebellion against God. (Ezekiel 2:3-6) What is clear is that both prophets saw their messages as a challenge to the people to repent and mend their societies and their society's relationship with God.

With the harshness of this message, it is again not surprising, that the sages sought a closing verse for this haftarah to remind their audience of the message of solace removed from the beginning of the haftarah: "Just now you called Me [God], 'Father!' You are the Companion of my youth.'" (Jeremiah 3:4) In the end, we and all of God's creatures will recognize God's truth!

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*collaborative environment. We welcome your support at
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Not Going into the Land, AGAIN?!

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

During their wanderings in trans-Jordan, the Israelites conquer some of the lands in the area. The tribes of Gad and Reuben had a great deal of livestock. Realizing that these areas were well suited for grazing, they approach Moshe requesting not to cross the Jordan into the land.

Text: Bamidbar 32:6-15

(6) And Moshe said to the Gadites and to the Reubenites, "Are your brothers to go to war while you settle here? (7) Why will you sway the heart of the Israelites from crossing into the land that the LORD has given them? (8) That is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to survey the land...they turned the hearts of the Israelites from coming to the land that the LORD had given them... (13) The LORD was incensed with Israel and He made them wander in the desert for forty years, until the end of the entire generation that did evil in the eyes of the LORD. (14) And here you rose up replacing your fathers, a breed of sinful men... (15) If you turn away from Him and He abandons them again in the wilderness, you will bring destruction upon all this people!

- Why is Moshe against the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad?
- How many arguments does Moshe give against the request of these tribes?
- What do you expect the reaction of the rest of the people of Israel to be to this request?
- What might be the long-term danger of the proposal of the 2 tribes vis a vis the rest of the nation?

Commentary: Seforno Bamidbar 32:6

Will your brothers go to war – do you indeed think that your brothers will want to go and fight to conquer, while you will settle here – in what was already conquered?! There is no doubt that you do not think that you will succeed in [convincing them of] this, so this is merely intended to sway your brothers' hearts away.

- According to Seforno, how many arguments does Moshe give against the request?
- How does Moshe understand the request by the 2 tribes? Why do you think that they would want to talk the nation out of crossing into the land?
- Based on what the tribes said, their main motive is economic. Why does Moshe find this so difficult to accept? When do we find this difficult to accept, and when should we accept this reason as a valid one?