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Loving Jews

For 40 years, Camp HASC, tucked away in Sullivan County, has been pulling out all the stops in order to provide the most enjoyable, enriching and fun-filled summer experience for "children and adults with special needs, intellectual and physical disabilities."

While participating in their morning minyan, it dawned on me that most of the counselors were half my age (at least) -- and carrying twice as much responsibility. I'm not sure about you, but I can assure you that my summer "experience" as a 20-year old paled in comparison to the selfless contributions of these young adults. These young men and women willingly forfeited a pool-side summer of leisure or their own "chilled out" experience as a camper competing in "color war" in order to pour out their heart, soul, time and effort (physical and emotional) in the hopes of brightening the lives of those suffering from a variety of physical and mental handicaps.

At one point, a particularly young counselor (I wouldn't be surprised if my siddur was older than him) interrupted his davening to physically attend to a camper and literally carry him to a different location but the thought crossed my mind that I should really be standing up for this dynamic duo -- no less than I would be duty-bound to stand for another Jew lifting a Sefer Torah.

This brief glimpse into true love for one's fellow Jew was a timely lesson as we enter the month of Av and the sobering reality of the Nine Days. Indeed, part and parcel of anyone who is sincerely yearning for a rebuilt Jerusalem is a sincere soul-searching as to the nature and degree of our love for our fellow Jew.

"Real love," Rabbi Aharon Feldman writes, "exists where one is willing to give up something dear to him for the benefit of another person." (from "River, Kettle and the Bird").

The tribes of Gad and Reuven said, "If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a heritage; do not bring us across the Jordan."

"Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven, 'Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here? Why do you dissuade the heart of the Children of Israel from crossing to the land that Hashem has given them?'" (Num. 32:5-7)

Rashi: "Why do you dishearten them [i.e., the other tribes] from crossing [into Eretz Yisrael]? For they will be under the impression that you are afraid to cross because of the war and the strength of the town and the people?"

Upon hearing Gad and Reuven's request to settle outside the proper boundaries of the Land of Israel, Moshe does not launch into an impassioned persuasive plea in the hopes they will reconsider. Rather, Moshe, the consummate leader and Commander-in-Chief goes to the heart of the matter - i.e., what the consequences of Gad and Reuven's decision will mean for the morale and well-being (physical, emotional and psychological) of the rest of the Jewish nation. One's choices are not in a vacuum, but rather have consequences for Jews and those consequences must be reckoned with lest we become consumed with self-interest and a "what's in it for me" mindset.

This type of expansive-thinking is an appropriate place to focus our efforts during the ensuing Nine Days leading up to Tisha b'Av. As the Alter from Kelm writes repeatedly, "It is a great merit to worry about the well-being of one's fellow Jew."

True, our mental "work pad" is often stuffed to the gills. Nevertheless, let us seek to find some emotional bytes and earmark them for the sharing in the burdens of our fellow Jew. This person's bid to find suitable employment. Another one's financial struggles. Her dating woes. His compromised health. For when we clear the space in our heart to care for those less fortunate - when we emulate those heroes of Camp HASC - we will capitalize on the hallowed days of Av.



MATOT Getting In To Get Out

Your word is your bond - Parashas Mattos reminds us of the timeless values that have distinguished our people throughout the centuries. As the parashah opens, Moshe commands the leaders of the tribes, and, through them, the entire nation, regarding the sanctity of vows and the tragic consequences of not keeping one's word, which the Torah regards as a desecration.[1]

Our faith is linked to the sanctity of speech. It is through speech that we committed ourselves to an eternal covenant with God when we proclaimed "Na'aseh v'nishma." It is through speech, via prayer and Torah study, that we continue to connect with our God. It is through speech that we give expression to the Divine spark that God breathed into our beings. It is through speech that God created the world and it is through speech that we, in our own human fashion, send forth positive or negative

energies. As stated previously, "Death and life are in the tongue." [2]

We have 14 positive and 17 negative commandments, all centering around speech. To protect us from using our tongues irresponsibly, God places them behind two gates, our teeth and our lips, so that before we speak, we may weigh and measure our words, for once they are spoken, we cannot easily undo them or take them back. The damage wrought by broken promises, curses, and painful or blasphemous words cannot be easily erased. The converse, of course, is also true. Kind, warm, loving words are balm for the soul and have the power to transform darkness into light and despair into hope.

ANOTHER FACE OF GRATITUDE

God instructs Moses to "take vengeance ... against the Midianites," [3] but, strangely enough, rather than assume this responsibility, Moses appoints Phinehas to lead the people in battle. At first glance, it is difficult to understand Moses' reaction, for he was a loyal servant of God, ever ready to do His bidding, and this transfer of responsibility is totally out of character for him. But herein lies a powerful lesson to guide us on the road of life.

When Pharaoh discovered that Moses, the young prince, was a Jew, he was determined to kill him. Moses had to flee for his life and found refuge in the land of Midian. Many years had passed since that incident. The world scene had changed; the Midianites were an evil, immoral people, bent upon seducing and destroying the Jewish nation. Nevertheless, Moses could not do battle against them, for at one point in his life, he had benefited from the Midianites' hospitality. Similarly, when God brought the Ten Plagues upon Egypt, Moses was not permitted to strike the water of the Nile (Aaron struck the Nile), for, when he was an infant, the water had sheltered him. If Moses had to be grateful to a body of water, an incorporeal entity that had not made a willful decision to save him, how much more should it hold true for human beings? We are never permitted to forget or take for granted an act of kindness or a favor rendered.

This message is especially relevant to our generation, in which ingratitude is so commonplace. We easily forget benefits that we have enjoyed and rationalize our insensitivity by saying, "It's coming to me!" or "They owe it to me!" Let us guard against such rationalizations; let us never lose sight of the kindnesses

that have been extended to us and let us work on developing our sense of gratitude.

A TRUE LEADER

God instructs Moses to tell the Jewish people to do battle against the Midianites who were the cause of the terrible plague that befell them. At the same time, however, God also informs Moses that following that battle he would die.[4] Knowing this information before the battle, Moses could have taken his time, especially since God did not give him a specific time frame in which to carry out his task. No one could have faulted him had he delayed this action in order to prolong his life. Moses, however, responds with alacrity to the call of Hashem and puts aside his own personal wishes. And that is the mark of true greatness, true leadership: to have the ability to think of the greater good of one's family and one's people rather than one's own narrow, selfish concerns.

Moses' example challenges us to examine our own actions, our own priorities. Are we prompted by selfish concerns? Do we come first, or do we see the needs of our families, our people, and the call of God as our first priority?

LIFE'S BATTLES

The soldiers of Israel return victorious from their battle with the Midianites, but, paradoxically, it is written, "who came to battle," rather than "who returned from battle." [5] From this we learn that after winning a battle, after tasting success, we may feel overly confident and arrogant, deluding ourselves into believing that we no longer are required to be vigilant. Therefore, the soldiers of our people are warned that the real battle is just starting, and that is the battle of life. The battle of life is a constant struggle against the yetzer hara, of which we must remain vigilant until the day we die.

In this same parashah, Elazar the priest proceeds to instruct the people in regard to the laws of kashering vessels by purging them. One may wonder about the connection between these two themes, and once again there is a message for us: The path to success in our ongoing life struggle is to purge ourselves of all that is "non-kosher," all that is antithetical to the Torah way of life. But what we should remember for all time, what should imbue us with courage and hope, is the deeper meaning of this teaching. If a pot, which is an inanimate object, can be made kosher, how much more so can a human being, who carries within him the breath of God, who has a holy neshamah,

become holy again and be purged of even the most terrible failings.

HOW MUCH DO YOU FEEL?

The Torah informs us that the tribes of Reuben and Gad had abundant livestock and requested permission from Moses to settle on the other side of the Jordan where the land "is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." [6]

Moses' response transcends the centuries and speaks to us in every generation: "Shall your brothers go to battle while you settle here?" [7]

We, the Jewish people, are one family. If any one of us is hurting, we are all hurting. The heart of each and every Jew must beat with the heart of his people. Yes, Moses' question challenges us in every generation.

Our parents have often related how, in the concentration camps, they asked, "Can it be that our brethren in America are silent? Can it be that they are busy with their own lives while we are being fed to the ovens? Can it be that they don't hear our cry? Can it be that they don't see our tears? Can it be ...? Can it be ...?"

This question of Moses speaks to us, not only in times of Holocaust, but in our everyday family life as well. Can it be that you are buying jewelry while your sister can't pay her rent? Can it be that you are going on vacation while your father is lying alone in his hospital bed? Can it be that you are celebrating at your holiday table while your brother sits alone in his dark apartment? Can it be ...? Can it be ...?

Moses' challenge demands that we take a good look at our lives and examine to what extent we feel empathy for our families, for our people. When you read in the papers that there was another suicide attack in Israel in which our people were massacred, do you stop to shed a tear? Do you stop to pronounce a prayer, or do you move on? Is it business as usual?

JEWISH PRIORITIES

The tribes of Reuben and Gad hastened to assure Moses that they intended to join their brethren in battle. "Pens for the flock shall we build here for our livestock and cities for our small

children. We shall arm ourselves swiftly in the vanguard of the Children of Israel...."[8]

Moshe Rabbeinu is not satisfied with their response and corrects them, saying, "Build for yourselves cities for your small children and pens for your flock."[9]

There is a profound lesson in Moshe Rabbeinu's correction that, once again, is relevant for all times. Even as the tribes of Reuben and Gad put their livestock before their families; even as the tribes of Reuben and Gad prioritized Israel - the Jewish people - over Hashem, there are those today who put business first and families second, and regard their commitment to Israel and the Jewish people above their faith in Hashem. They forget that love of Israel and the Jewish nation has meaning only if it is rooted in Torah and commitment to God.

NOTES

1. Numbers 30:3.
2. Proverbs 18:21.
3. Numbers 31:1.
4. Ibid. 31:1-2.
5. Ibid. 31:21.
6. Ibid. 32:1-5.
7. Ibid. 32:6.
8. Ibid. 32:16-17.
9. Ibid. 32:24.

* * *

MASAY

Life's Journeys

The reading of Parashas Masei always coincides with the season that marks Jewish suffering and sorrow: the anniversary of the destruction of our Holy Temples. But our Torah never speaks of sorrow without imparting hope and consolation. So it is that this parashah imbues us with strength and faith, and the very fact that these tragedies occurred in the Jewish month of Menachem Av, which, literally translated, means "a comforting father," speaks volumes.

The parashah teaches us that we were launched upon life's journeys "al pi Hashem - at the bidding of God,"[1] and that knowledge, in and of itself, is the greatest source of comfort. We

are fortified in the realization that our journeys are not just random happenings. There is a God above us Who directs it all, Who oversees our going forth and our coming in. Nothing, but nothing, escapes Him. He hears our cries, He sees our tears, and He never forsakes us. Yes, there is a purpose to our wandering, even though we may not understand it. We are strengthened in the knowledge that there is an ultimate destination to which God leads us.

To reinforce this teaching, the Torah reader chants this parashah to a special tune so that we may be ever mindful that we are not alone. Even as our forefather's journeys through the Wilderness were hazardous, but they arrived safely to their destination, Eretz Yisrael, just the same, so too shall we arrive in the Promised Land, no matter how difficult our journey may be. God is leading us.

The Torah speaks of 42 encampments along life's journey. Forty-two is a mystical number, comprising the letters in God's ineffable Name. There is a kabbalistic teaching that as a result of our sins, those letters in God's holy Name have become blemished, and so we embark upon our journeys to gather those holy sparks and return them to wholeness, to God's holy Name, which we have blemished through our sins. When our journeys become difficult, when they test our mettle and we wonder how we can possibly go on, let us remember that there is a purpose to our journeys. We need only stay the Torah course and God will guide us to our ultimate destination.

THE LAND IS OUR DESTINY

Moshe Rabbeinu apportions the land among the tribes in accordance to a goral (drawing of lots).[2] The word goral, however, has a double meaning. It not only means "lot," but also "destiny." The land is our destiny for all eternity. Thus, the Torah teaches us that the Jewish people, Hashem, Torah, and the Land of Israel are forever intertwined. No matter what the political situation may be, no matter what the nations of the world or world leaders may scheme, that land is our Divine destiny, and no human being and no nation can ever negate that. Our history is testimony to that eternal truth. Indeed, there is no nation on Planet Earth that has been separated from its land for almost 2,000 years and yet remained loyal to that land. And moreover, there is no country on earth that, throughout the long centuries, rejected all its occupiers, all its conquerors, to await her children's homecoming. Over 3,000 years ago, our

Torah proclaimed that Eretz Yisrael is our goral, the destiny of the Jewish people, and today, history testifies to it.

CITIES OF REFUGE: SPIRITUAL REJUVENATION

Moshe Rabbeinu instructs the nation in regard to the establishment of six arei miklat (cities of refuge),^[3] three on either side of the Jordan. These cities belonged to the Levites and were to provide sanctuaries to those who were guilty of accidental murder. While their crimes may have been unintentional, nevertheless, blood was spilled and the perpetrator could not simply resume his life as though nothing had happened. Such a tragic deed required spiritual rehabilitation. Additionally, the guilty parties needed protection from the vengeful family members of the victim. So it was that the man who had blood on his hands relocated to a city of refuge accompanied by his family and his rabbi - his Torah teacher.

One might ask why it was necessary for his Torah teacher to go with him. After all, these cities were inhabited by Levites who were all well versed in Torah. But each rabbi, each Torah teacher, has his own unique approach, and when a soul is in crisis and carries the heavy burden of having murdered, albeit accidentally, the teacher who could best penetrate the depths of his soul must be there to teach.

From this we learn that Hashem worries about each and every one of us, so we should never feel that we have been rejected or abandoned by Him or that we are beyond redemption. In the Torah, there is an ir miklat for every person. Now, if God has commanded us to make such provisions for those who committed a crime, albeit unintentional, then we too must extend love and concern to each and every person. Let us merit Hashem's mercy by being merciful to one another.

NOTES

1. Numbers 33:2.
2. Ibid. 34:13.
3. Ibid. 35:11-15.



Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The most popular electronic weekly in the Jewish world with over 300,000 readers.

Rabbi Kalman Packouz
Aish HaTorah

Would you like to be great? Our sages tell us that if we want to be great, we should do a nightly cheshbon hanefesh, an accounting of our deeds. Before you go to bed, sit for a few minutes in the quiet and ask yourself (and answer) four questions: 1) What am I living for? 2) What did I do towards my goal today? 3) What did I do counter to my goal today? 4) What is something that is more important to live for? Do that every night before you go to sleep and you have a guarantee of making more out of your life.

There is an old witticism, "Remember, you are unique -- just like everyone else." While each and every human being is precious and special, there are inner aspirations which are common to all of us. To reach your potential -- to be all that you can be and to get the most out of life -- it is important to recognize and understand the universal needs and desires common to mankind. If you recognize that these are beliefs and values that are a part of you, then you can lead your life towards greater fulfillment by focussing on them.

THE UNIVERSAL BELIEFS COMMON TO MANKIND

1. We All Need Meaning. Did you ever ask yourself, "What is it all about?" "What is the point of it all?" Life is more than contentment. No one aspires to emulate a cow contented to graze and lie in the sun.
2. We Are Not Fulfilling Our Potential. No matter what we accomplish, we feel we could do more. We feel that we have a greater potential than doing just the mundane.
3. We All Want To Be Great. Nobody wants to be mediocre. We want to be special.
4. We Turn To God For Help. If you turn to God in a pinch, then don't wait for the pinch. Ask yourself, "How do I develop a relationship with the Almighty?" and "What does God want me to do with my life to reach my potential?"
5. We Want To Be Good. People are willing to die to be good. If there is something you would be willing to die for, then it

is worth living for it. Figure out what you should be living for.

6. We Feel Responsible For the World. If you ask someone, "What are you doing to stop the genocide in Africa?" he'll answer, "What can I do about it?" He won't say, "It's not my problem." Everyone knows that it's our problem. Everyone knows that we are responsible for the world and others ... we just don't know what to do or are overwhelmed by the responsibility.

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR LIFE GOALS:

1. You dreamed at 20 what you would like to do or be. Are you living that dream?
2. What would you want said at your eulogy?
3. Who is your hero? Why?
4. When do you feel most meaningful?
5. If you could make a difference, what would you do?

Combine the Universal Beliefs of Mankind and the above questions with the nightly accounting ... and you will be on your way to greatness ... and a much more meaningful life!

Torah Portion of the Week: Matos and Masei

Matos includes the laws of making and annulling vows, the surprise attack on Midian (the '67 War wasn't the Jewish people's first surprise attack!) in retribution for the devastation the Midianites wreaked upon the Jewish people, the purification after the war of people and vessels, dedicating a portion of the spoils to the communal good (perhaps the first Federation campaign), the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad for their portion of land to be east of the Jordan river (yes, Trans-Jordan/Jordan is also part of the Biblical land of Israel). Moshe objects to the request because he thinks the tribes will not take part in the conquering of the land of Israel; the tribes clarify that they will be the advance troops in the attack and thus receive permission.

Masei includes the complete list of journeys in the desert (the name of each stop hints at a deeper meaning, a lesson learned there). God commands to drive out the land's inhabitants, to destroy their idols and to divide the land by a lottery system. God establishes the borders of the Land of Israel. New leadership is appointed, cities of the Levites and Cities of Refuge

(where an accidental murderer may seek asylum) are designated. Lastly, the laws are set forth regarding accidental and willful murder as well as inheritance laws only for that generation regarding property of a couple where each came from a different tribe.

Dvar Torah - from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D.

The Torah states:

"These are the journeys of the Children of Israel ... Moses wrote their goings forth according to their journeys" (Numbers 33:1-2).

The Torah commentaries say that the enumeration of the journeys and encampments was to review all that had transpired during the forty years in the desert. The names listed are not necessarily the names of the places, but hints as to what the people did in those places.

A person who has a purpose and goal in life will pause every now and then to assess how much he has accomplished toward reaching his objective.

Many tzaddikim, (righteous people) did an accounting every night to see what they accomplished during that day and to correct whatever deficiencies they discovered.

So it was with Moses at the end of the forty years in the desert. The Israelites were about to enter the Holy Land and he was about to turn over the leadership to Joshua. The period of his stewardship had come to a close. It was time to see what Moses and the Israelites had achieved during the past forty years, hence the meticulous review of the journeys and encampments and what had transpired in each place.

If we are serious about achieving a goal in our lives we must periodically take inventory. What have we accomplished? How can we better use our time?

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Discipline trumps motivation! -- Jocko Willink



The
**Family
Parsha**
By Nesanel Yoel Safran
Lessons, stories and
discussion questions
for parents and kids

Getting In To Get Out

We get as much out of something as we put into it. In this week's Torah portion (Num. 31:27) we learn that when it came time to divide the riches that the people acquired while traveling to the Land of Israel, God didn't tell us to divide it equally among everyone. Rather, those who exerted themselves more for it, got more. We can learn from here that the more we invest in an activity and take it seriously, the more we'll get back in the end.

In our story, a kid discovers that the more we 'get into' something, the more we get out of it.

CANDLE CAN-DO

"Isn't this the dumbest thing in the world?" Tom griped to his buddy, Steven, as the two of them stood with the rest of their bunkmates around the long wooden arts and crafts table. "I wish we could be doing something fun now," Tom went on, flicking small pieces of the clay he was supposed to be using for his pottery-making project out the window "like swimming or horseback riding, instead of this baby stuff, don't you?"

"I like sports best, too," Steven admitted, "but this is also part of the camp schedule, so why not try to get into it? I'm gonna make a pair of ceramic candlesticks for my mom. I think they're going to come out nice," he said, as he carefully diagrammed his project design on a piece of graph paper. "And what are you making?"

Tom shrugged, lowering the music blasting through his earphones. "I don't want to make anything. I don't even want be here. But I heard if you don't participate you get early curfew."

Tom halfheartedly plopped a small lump of modeling clay on top of another larger one...

The next few Mondays and Wednesdays - the days when the guys had arts and crafts -the scene repeated itself. Steven worked diligently on his project - shaping, measuring, molding and painting, as Tom spaced out, listening to his ipod and pretending to make something when he thought the counselor was looking.

Visiting day arrived, a day all the campers looked forward to as a chance to reunite with their families, and especially to restock on spending money and all the treats and nosh they were sure to bring. Steven's parents and Tom's - good friends and neighbors themselves - drove upstate to the camp together.

"Hi Mom!" Steven called out, running up to the van as it arrived in the parking lot, greeting his mother with a big smile and handing her the neatly wrapped package he held in his hands.

"Hi Mom!" Tom echoed, same smile, but hands empty.

"Wow, these are just stunning!" Steven's mother exclaimed as she unwrapped the sleek, shining glazed-ceramic candlesticks. "Where could you go shopping around here?" she asked.

"Nah," Steven smiled widely, not sure whether his mom really thought he'd bought them. "I made them for you in arts and crafts."

"Oh, how thoughtful of you!" She gave him a hug.

"Do you also go to that class?" Tom's mother asked her son, as she admired Steven's handiwork.

"Uh, yeah," Tom shuffled, uncomfortably. Boy, did Steven's mother look happy - and boy, did he wish he had something nice to give his mom, too. "I just ... the stuff I made ... kinda broke in the end." Yeah, when I tossed the shapeless lump of clay into the garbage can as soon as it had come out of the pottery kiln.

"Gee, that's too bad," his mother said sympathetically, a slight look of disappointment on her face. "I'm sure if it hadn't, you

would have shown me something just as nice. Sorry it didn't work out."

Tom nodded, but inside he knew that the problem wasn't because it didn't 'work out' - but simply, to his regret, that he hadn't put more 'work in' to it.

Discussion Questions

Ages 3-5

Q. How did Tom feel at first about not working at his arts and crafts project?

A. He felt it didn't matter, so why bother trying?

Q. How did he feel in the end?

A. He felt sorry he hadn't tried harder when he saw how happy Steven's project made his mom.

Ages 6-9

Q. What life-lesson could someone learn from what happened?

A. When someone takes the easy way out and doesn't take his tasks seriously, he can think it doesn't matter. But in truth, there are always consequences and by choosing not to try hard - we are choosing not to accomplish.

Q. How would you describe the difference in the two boys' attitudes?

A. Even though they would both have rather been playing sports, Steven chose to make the most of the situation he was in - and thereby had a positive experience, while Tom chose to pout in protest - gaining nothing.

Ages 10 and Up

Q. Do you think there is anything spiritual about working hard at a task?

A. God gave each of us special talents and the energy to use them. When we exert ourselves at a task, we are acknowledging God's gifts to us and declaring that we see life as meaningful. Of course, we should be sure that we're using our talents and energy in a positive way.

Q. Do you think there are any shortcuts to life - that is ways to achieve something worthwhile without trying?

A. While it may sound nice in theory - life doesn't work that way. All genuine life achievements only come one way - through dedication and effort.



How Do We Find Joy in the Process?

A waiter remembers every detail of an order but forgets those details as soon as the plates hit the table. Inspired by this thought experiment, German psychologist Bluma Wulfovna Zeigarnik conducted a series of laboratory tests to demonstrate that people have a better recollection of the puzzles they are prevented from finishing than those they have completed. Evidently, our brains are wired to be preoccupied with the details of incomplete tasks. We have a deep-seated need to see things to the end. The human condition is to not be satisfied, to not let our minds rest, until we do what we set out do to.

The problem is, very often we don't. Very often, for whatever reason, we simply aren't able to reach the finish line.

One of our great sages of the twentieth century, Rav Eliyahu Dessler, writes, "We are born in the middle of things and we die in the middle of things." Friends - life is messy. Full of loose ends, false starts, unfulfilled objectives. The question is, what should our attitude be to this unsatisfying state of affairs?

In this week's Torah portion, Masei, God gives Moshe the mitzvah of designating the cities of refuge - safe spaces for those who have inadvertently taken a life to escape to, to seek

refuge from avenging parties and for atonement. There were six cities of refuge to be established - three east of the Jordan River and three west of the Jordan River. The eastern territory had already been conquered by this stage, and to get things started, Moshe was tasked with establishing these first three cities. He did this with great enthusiasm, knowing that he would never get to establish the three western cities, because God had decreed that he would not cross the Jordan River and lead the Jewish people into the land of Israel. That mission was left to his successor, Joshua.

Analysing the verse, Rashi comments that the six cities were a single bloc, and that none of the cities would be operational until all six were established. This means that the three eastern cities that Moshe set up did not become operational until Joshua conquered the western side of the Jordan River and established the other three. In other words, not only did Moshe not have the chance to complete the task, he never got to see any of the fruits of his efforts realised. The Talmud (Makot 10a) says this was a mark of Moshe's greatness - that his passion for fulfilling God's will was such that he threw himself into the task of establishing these cities even though he knew he would never complete it.

The obvious lesson here is that we need to savour each moment, each accomplishment, each step along our life's journey. On the one hand, it's good to be goal-oriented and to keep an eye on the destination. On the other hand, we cannot be consumed with our goals to the point where we are unable to savour the small moments and the small victories. Because these small moments and small victories are an important part of our lives.

Every moment of life is precious. We learn this from pikuach nefesh - the principle that virtually all of the Torah's laws are suspended in order to save a life. Even if it's to prolong that life for a few moments. Life is nothing but the sum of small moments. Each moment is sacred because life is sacred.

Torah learning provides a good illustration of the importance of small moments and small victories. The Mishna teaches that the mitzvah of learning Torah has no fixed limit. The Vilna Gaon has a novel reading of the Mishna. He says that this teaching applies at both ends of the spectrum - there is no upper limit on the amount of Torah one can learn, but there is also no minimum

amount; each word of Torah we learn is a distinct mitzvah with eternal value.

Kindness is another example. We have a Torah mandate to make this world a kinder, gentler place. But the mitzvah of chesed is fulfilled through incremental actions and gestures - a kind word, a small gesture, a brief embrace. Tzedakah is another example - a mitzvah performed one coin at a time. And prayer. It is made up of many individual words. Each of which has its own meaning and opportunity for devotion and connection to God.

We see this principle articulated most explicitly in the Mishna in Pirkei Avot: "It is not on you to complete the work, but nor are you free to desist from it." (Pirkei Avot 2:16). Though the Mishnah is referring specifically to the mitzvah of Torah learning, which being God's infinite wisdom, by definition can never fully be comprehended or "completed", it applies no less to every mitzvah we perform, and all of the objectives we pursue over the course of our lives. "We are born in the middle of things and we die in the middle of things."

This could also be the message at the beginning of our Torah portion, Masei, which chronicles the journey of the Jewish people in the desert in painstaking detail. Each leg, each stopover of the 40-year journey is mentioned by name. Why is that? If anything there's good reason not to dwell on the drawn-out journey, which only became necessary because of the sin of the spies. But perhaps the verse does so to underline that each step of a journey is important, each moment is significant, each mitzvah is a milestone. We should not look at life as one unit. We should savour each of its components.

The arc of Moshe's life embodies this idea. He was appointed with the mandate to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, bring them to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, and then to lead them into the land of Israel. Due to events in the desert, Moshe's mandate to lead the people into Israel was transferred to Joshua. And so in a certain fundamental sense his mission was incomplete. The fairy tale ending would have been Moshe triumphantly leading the people into the land of Israel. But the Torah is a book of truth. It's a description of life as it is. And in real life "We are born in the middle of things, and we die in the middle of things." There are no neat beginnings and endings, no neat resolutions. God is the master of the universe and it is not

in our hands to complete our arcs and wrap up our lives in a neat little bow. All we can do is focus on and appreciate each moment; take each task and each mitzvah one at a time; ensure we win life's small victories.

All we can do is live with complete faith that Hashem will give us the time we need on this earth to do what we need to do - what we were born to do - even if it feels messy and unsatisfactory, even if it feels that things are incomplete.

The key is to live with humility and appreciation - the humility that comes with understanding that we don't control everything, and the appreciation that comes with savouring each moment and each small victory. And we need to encourage that attitude in our children. To encourage them in each milestone accomplished, each mitzvah performed, each moment of grace and kindness, no matter how seemingly small.

As Jews, we believe in a Final Redemption - an era of the Messiah, in which the world is perfected, peace and closeness to God reign on earth, and human history is brought to a glorious close. We all long for such a time. And yet there is only one generation that will merit to witness this closure. We hope and pray that we are that generation - that the redemption happens today - and yet we carry on with our lives with the peace of mind that every good deed we do, every step we take in the right direction, every small difference we make in improving the world we live in is part of the unfolding of human history and leading inexorably towards the time we all long for.

It's about the small steps on the journey of life.

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