

July 1, 2010

Shabbat Shalom!

When my family would take car trips across the country when I was in elementary school, I remember how meticulously my father planned our itinerary in the days before Orbitz, Travelocity, AAA online, Mapquest, and GPS. He would purchase all the relevant Mobil Travel Guides and acquire all the maps we needed and plot the route himself. As we traveled, I was a partner in keeping an hourly mileage log. I became familiar with a variety of milestones on the highways through those trips which still stand me in good stead today (even on the New York Thruway and Mass Pike). As important as our daily destinations were, all those important points along the way showed how far we had come on our journey.

The Torah reading for this week in Numbers, Chapter 33, provides the Israelites' detailed itinerary for their wanderings from Egypt to their final point of encampment before entering the land of Canaan. With the language, "They set out a point A and encamped at point B," the entire trek was summarized in 49 verses, encompassing everywhere they had been as described in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and earlier in the book of Numbers. The 12th Century Jewish sage Moses Maimonides suggested that the Torah enumerated these stations along the way in order to legitimize and support the entire tale of what had happened in the Israelites' travels: times of wonder, struggles with other peoples, and challenges among themselves. Maimonides suggested that this place-by-place review affirmed the miracle of a people wandering together for 40 years and remaining intact, even strong, as a people.

We sometimes map out our own lives like this on a resume, when we list our previous employment, but perhaps we take the time, on our own, to map out the stops along our life's journey: places we have lived, the friendships we have made and that endure, significant milestones, our spiritual development and beliefs, as well as what values we prized the most at different stages of our lives. Every day is a step along our journey, and we can, like the Israelites, take the opportunity to remember where we have been in order to look back later and see how much we have accomplished in our lives.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry