

Matot - Massei

Building Forward

The opening verse of Parshat Massei summarizes its theme of recounting the Jewish journey. “These are the travels of the Jews whom left Egypt... (Bamidbar 33:1).” The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser, 1809-1879) asks that this description seems strange, why does the verse talk about where the Jews left from as apposed to focusing on where they were traveling to: Israel?

An Answer

Malbim suggests a most beautiful resolution. While it is true that the Jews were traveling towards the special destination of the Promised Land, remembering where they came from and all of the steps that brought about their growth along the way is a most important Torah idea. Therefore, the Torah saw fit to mention the fact that the Jews were coming from Egypt. Their journey began with servitude and with Hashem putting them through a purification process as slaves. This brought them to greatness.

Indeed, the entire recounting of all the forty-two stops is to remind the Jews about their trials, tribulations, and victories throughout their forty-year sojourn in the desert. Rashi explains that the travels are enumerated in order to bring out the kindness of Hashem, G-d. By contemplating all of the challenges and all of the difficulties one was compelled to ask how he or she made it through. The only answer is with Hashem’s help.

Original Man

When Adam was created, he was able to eat fruits from the tree and strangely, the sages tell us that the branches and bark of the tree tasted like the fruit itself. This is to hint to the idea that every step of growth is really producing delicious and real results. When one watched a tree grow, he did not have to wait for the fruit at the end to see his efforts come to fruition, rather, as soon as the branch and bark appeared, the sweet taste was present. This is the deep reality of all endeavors.

But it all changed when Adam sinned and ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Now, he was cursed that only by the sweat of his brow would he eat bread. The fruit would not be seen until all of the effort was put in. He would have to have faith to see that all of his blood, sweat and tears were producing and would shine forth in the end. This is most challenging and difficult. But the recognition of this truth is most empowering and inspirational.

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This is the challenge in this world. We often don't see or taste the "fruits" of our labor, our Torah and mitzvot, our kindness towards others and our efforts, but we have faith that G-d will reward us in the World to Come. Every step of the way is building the most beautiful construct for us, just as every step of the way in Egypt brought the Jews to Mount Sinai and every step in the desert brought them eventually to Israel. The wise man learns to savor each step of the way with the perspective that G-d sees and counts every minute action of his and He will reward him accordingly.

Shabbat Shalom

The JSN Team

