

The Journeys of Our Lives<sup>1</sup>  
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What was the last journey you went on? Was it a vacation? A trip between two homes? A visit to family? To see friends? Was it joyous? Stressful? Easy? Challenging? How many journeys overall have you taken since last Rosh Hashanah?

So, what actually is a journey?

The dictionary defines 'journey' two ways.

1. An act of traveling from one place to another - That is what we usually think of when we say the word journey. OR
2. A long and often difficult process of personal change and development.

In addition to the physical journeys we have taken over the year, during the High Holy Days we are asked to reflect on the personal internal journeys we have taken.

The Hebrew word for journey is *Masa*. The Torah portion of that name - *Masei*, tells of the journeys the Israelites took after leaving Mt. Sinai.

In Num. Chapter 33 we read:

<sup>5</sup> The Israelites set out from Ramses and encamped at Succot.

<sup>6</sup> They set out from Succot and encamped at Eitham, which is on the edge of the wilderness.

<sup>7</sup> They set out from Eitam and turned about toward Pi-hahiroth, ... and they encamped before Migdol.

<sup>8</sup> They set out from Pi-hahiroth and passed through the sea into the wilderness; and they made a three-days' journey in the wilderness of Eitam and encamped at Marah.

<sup>9</sup> They set out from Marah and came to Elim. There were twelve springs in Elim and seventy palm trees, so they encamped there.

<sup>10</sup> They set out from Elim and encamped by the Sea of Reeds.<sup>c</sup> <sup>11</sup> They set out from the Sea of Reeds and encamped in the wilderness of Sin.

This is just some of the list. The names of the places they journeyed through go on and on. I pity the poor Bar Mitzvah student who has to read this. It is just a long list of funny sounding names. So why bother mentioning them all. The Torah could have said, "the Children of Israel went through many towns."

Forty-two places are mentioned overall. Some places are described as wilderness, others as springs with Palm trees. Those towns might have meant a great deal to the Israelites, but to us, just a long list of hard to pronounce names. The Sages

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the teachings of Rabbi Naomi Levy in her book, *Einstein and the Rabbi: Searching for the Soul*. Chapter 35. Perceiving the Forty-Two Journeys of Your soul.

wondered, “Why does the Torah feel it is so important to include each and every name?” Perhaps it is because each town they visited involved both a traveling from one place to another, AND a long and often difficult process of personal change and development.

So now I will go back to my original questions and see if you have different answers. What was the last internal journey that you took? Was it joyous? Stressful? Easy? Challenging? How many internal journeys overall have you taken since last Rosh Hashanah?

Looking back over the past year, can you see some of these experiences as spiritual journeys? This includes both wonderful, and not so wonderful moments. What makes an experience a spiritual journey - if you have learned something about yourself, or others around you, because of it.

Yes, some of our journeys have been quite hard. Are there still challenges from the past that continue to bother you, upset you, get in the way? Does that affect how you process current journeys? Those problems may have seemed very difficult and even horrific when they happened, but it’s how you have learned and grown from such experiences that matters. If such journeys help you look at your life in a new and more informed way, the negative memory becomes a spiritual journey rather than an awful experience. Rabbi Naomi Levy, in her book, Einstein and the Rabbi, describes such a journey this way. “What once appeared to you as a mountain, an obstruction right in your face, blocking your path, can become a mountain that is very far away, that you can gaze upon from a distance as a vista. Something that you can see but is no longer preventing you from moving forward.”<sup>2</sup>

Let’s take a closer look at the 42 journeys B’nai Yisrael experienced from such a spiritual perspective. The Baal Shem Tov taught that this very list contains hidden secrets pertaining not only to that generation but to **every generation**. Rabbi Noach Berezovsky<sup>3</sup> explains that those 42 towns represent the 42 journeys that each **soul** must pass through from birth until the final journey home to the *Olam HaBa*, the World-to-Come. This list is a blueprint for our lives, teaching us how to follow our souls **from journey to journey**. Rabbi Berezovsky calls these life lessons your “Personal Torah.” You learn your personal Torah by understanding that your soul **has work to do** in every place you go and everything that happens to you.

No matter what your age, you still have some of those 42 journeys left to experience. Some of the past journeys have been pleasurable, fun, enjoyable. Some not so much. How do we now face the journeys we have left? How you look at each challenge you face, can determine if this becomes one of the journeys your soul needs to complete. Instead of seeing it as a burden, something to ignore, something to get over or rid of

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<sup>2</sup> Einstein and the Rabbi: Searching for the Soul. Page 246

<sup>3</sup> Book of commentaries, Paths of Peace

as soon as possible, can you appreciate that it really is an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Each one of us has a calling, a mission to fulfill at every stage of our lives. Rabbi Levy describes some of the soul's jobs:

- To teach you about willpower and what to avoid.
- Perhaps to teach you to draw nearer to a situation you want to avoid.
- It may be to show you how big your heart is and how much pain you can endure.
- Sometimes your soul teaches you how to receive from others if you are always the one to give.
- And sometimes your soul is there to teach you to give and not expect anything in return.

Rashi reminds us that every one of the places the Children of Israel stopped and camped are called *masa-ot* - journeys. We too are the Children of Israel. Your setbacks, places where you feel you are stuck and can't make progress, times when you are unhappy, times when you are in physical or emotional pain, can be seen as one of your soul's 42 journeys. When you realize that nothing that occurred in your life was detrimental, that no experience a waste of time, that no mistake you made is really a mistake, this approach can help lead you on a better path.

The Hebrew work for sin is *Chet*. It is not really a negative word but an informative word. It means "missing the mark. Sometimes we **need to** "miss the mark" before we realize we have strayed from the path and need to change direction. Rabbi Levy teaches that "every life experience is an opportunity to unlock the good that is waiting for you. Every step in your journey is waiting for your unique presence to lift it up. For everything you do has cosmic ripples. Your soul can help you see the sacred stories in your lives, especially those that may have appeared to you as something you wish never happened."

Rabbi Levy encourages us to get a sense of where we are on our journeys so far. She suggests we take a piece of paper, sit quietly, and begin to write a list of our life's journeys - the best moments and the difficult ones. See if we can find a pattern, a direction, a bigger picture. Through this process we may notice that after going through a difficult journey, a better one emerges.

Rabbi Levy asks us to ponder the question - Why am I here **RIGHT NOW**? Is there something I am meant to give, or to do, or to receive? Someone we are meant to meet and influence, or be influenced by? What is the spiritual journey I need to be taking at this moment?

Don't let these sacred days of the High Holy Days go by without seeking out the hidden secret that is waiting for you each and every moment. For each of the Ten Days of Repentance, see if you can pinpoint the beginning of a larger journey, or just

a small journey within itself. If we need to experience 42 journeys in our lives in a spiritual way, how can we change the way we view our lives to accomplish that goal? To help, I have printed up Traveler's cards that I am handing out. Put it in your wallet. It is to protect you both physically and spiritually from upcoming journeys, asking God to guide you on your way. When you are going through a hard time, take the card out and read it. Ask God for help.

One last note: If you are struggling with a past experience and are having trouble seeing it as a spiritual journey, I am happy to meet with you privately and talk about it with you. After the Holy Days are over, send me an e-mail ([rabbimedwin@me.com](mailto:rabbimedwin@me.com)) or give me a call (706-765-2895), and we can find a time to talk.

I would like to end with a prayer that Rabbi Levy offers about journeys.

"I pray you will learn to view your life as a meaningful story. I pray you will learn to see how even your setbacks are leading you forward. May you step up to your soul's mission in every place and may you be blessed to fulfill it. Amen"

Music to reflect

T'filat Haderech

May we be blessed as we go on our way

May we be guided in peace

May we be blessed with health and joy

May this be our blessing, amen.

May we be sheltered by wings of peace

May we be kept in safety and in love

May grace and compassion find their

way to every heart

May this be our blessing, amen.

Amen, may this be our blessing, amen.

*-Debbie Friedman*