

RABBI'S MESSAGE

JOURNEYS AND NUMBERS

The month of April always makes me think of journeys. The classic journey in April (Nisan on the Hebrew calendar) is the journey of leaving the oppression of slavery toward the freedom of the Promised Land. Of course, we celebrate this journey every year with the observance of Passover. So often, the journeys in Torah include numbers. Though it is difficult to determine the exact accuracy of the numbers listed in Torah, studying the stories with their attached numbers might help us think about our own journeys.

40 is a very significant number in the Exodus story. According to Torah, Moses ascended to the top of Mount Sinai to retrieve the 10 Commandments from G-d and was gone for 40 days. The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land took 40 years. In both incidents, the number 40 is used to signify a LONG time, whether it is days or years. 40 is also considered an age of maturity and wisdom, as Jewish law recommends the study of Kabbalah only for those over 40. Later in Jewish history, King David's reign was said to be 40 years.

On a personal level, it's possible that I connect with journeys in April because it is also the month of my birth, April 23, 1961. I wasn't yet 40 years old when I first came to Temple Beth Torah in 1998, which was also TBT's 15th year of existence. And now we're talking about "20 years and counting." When we think about the 40-year journey we made through the wilderness, it feels like we may be at a half-way point.

And yet, the Israelites' journey did not end when they entered the Promised Land. Far from it! Just the tasks changed. Instead of having a temporary, focused goal with a specific destination, new tasks included establishing community, building a sacred temple and formalizing the practice of justice and traditions. As time went on, new tasks emerged, as rabbis developed the Talmud (oral law) to supplement and explain the Torah. Each generation helps mold the ever-evolving nature of our peoplehood and our practice, representing the broad spectrum of world-wide Jewish traditions and practices. Modern times have seen the emergence of different movements, like Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Renewal that help the diversity of Jewish people stay connected in ways that are meaningful to them.

Each journey involves growth and phases that involve exciting and potentially challenging times. The journeys of the Jewish people have spanned millennium; the American Judaism over decades; and Temple Beth Torah over three decades. At each new level, we celebrate the past and build toward the future. Twenty years seems like just a beginning.

Let's keep counting!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon