

Source Sheet for Shabbat Discussion

The Gift of “Journeying” through Life

Bemidbar 33:1

These were the marches of the Israelites who started out from the land of Egypt, troop by troop, in the charge of Moses and Aaron.

Rashi on Bemidbar 33:1

These were the marches of the Israelites: Why are the marches recorded here? To demonstrate how kindly God acted toward the Israelites. Even though He had decreed that he would drag them endlessly through the wilderness, you cannot say that they were simply dragged from place to place for 40 years with no respite. For there are only 42 marches here. Subtract the 14 that took place in the first year (before the decree) – the entire journey from Rameses to Rithmah...subtract another eight marches that took place after the death of Aaron, from Mt.Hor to the Steppes of Moab in the 40th year. So there were only 20 marches during the intervening 38 years...

But the Tanchuma took something different from it: Imagine a king whose son is sick. He takes him to a faraway place in order to cure him. On the way home, the father begins to count all the stops they made: “We slept here...here we caught cold...here you told me that your heart hurt...” and so forth.

Ramban on Bemidbar 33:1

These were the marches: Maimonides in the *Guide* points out a further benefit to listing the marches here. Indeed there was a great need to do so. For those who saw the signs and wonders knew perfectly well that they had occurred. But in the future they would be known only by report, and those who heard the report might not credit them. After all, it was an enormous miracle to keep the Israelites alive so far from civilization by providing them with manna day in and day out in a region where humans cannot naturally live. The Creator knew that as years passed people would begin to think of the miracles as merely legendary. They would assume that the people were simply close to settled areas (like today’s Arabs), or in places where agriculture was possible, or at least where various edible grasses and plants grew, and where water was available. But the listing of the marches of the Israelites – through the most isolated, inhospitable deserts – would ensure the future generations understood how great were the miracles that kept the Israelites alive in the wilderness.