

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Matot-Masei
July 11, 2026 *** 26 Tamuz, 5786

Matot-Masei in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2244/jewish/Matot-Masei-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, “Matot,” means “Tribes,” and it is found in Numbers 30:2. The name of the Parshah, “Masei,” means “Journeys,” and it is found in Numbers 33:1.

Moses conveys the laws governing the annulment of vows to the heads of the tribes of Israel. War is waged against Midian for their role in plotting the moral destruction of Israel, and the Torah gives a detailed account of the war spoils and how they were allocated amongst the people, the warriors, the Levites and the high priest.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad (later joined by half of the tribe of Manasseh) ask for the lands east of the Jordan as their portion in the Promised Land, these being prime pastureland for their cattle. Moses is initially angered by the request, but subsequently agrees on the condition that they first join, and lead, in Israel’s conquest of the lands west of the Jordan.

The forty-two journeys and encampments of Israel are listed, from the Exodus to their encampment on the plains of Moab across the river from the land of Canaan. The boundaries of the Promised Land are given, and cities of refuge are designated as havens and places of exile for inadvertent murderers. The daughters of Tzelafchad marry within their own tribe of Manasseh, so that the estate which they inherit

from their father should not pass to the province of another tribe.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Jeremiah 2:4-28; 4:1-2

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/895320/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah is the second of a series of three "haftarot of affliction." These three haftarot are read during the Three Weeks of mourning for Jerusalem, between the fasts of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av.

The prophet Jeremiah transmits G-d's message to the Jewish people, in strong tones chastising all the sectors of the people, including the leadership, for their abandonment of G-d. "What wrong did your forefathers find in Me, that they distanced themselves from Me, and they went after futility and themselves became futile?" He reminds them of the kindness G-d did for them, taking them out of Egypt and leading them through the desert and settling them in the Promised Land, yet they repaid kindness with disloyalty. "For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the spring of living waters, [and furthermore, this was in order] to dig for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that do not hold water."

G-d asks them to view the actions of their neighboring nations, the Kittites and Kedarites, "and see whether there was any such thing, whether a nation exchanged a god, although they are not gods. Yet My nation exchanged their glory for what does not avail."

Jeremiah then goes on to foretell the suffering the Jewish people will suffer at the hands of their enemies, and also their erstwhile allies: "Your evil will chastise you, and you will be rebuked for your backslidings; and you shall know and see that your forsaking the L-rd your G-d is evil and bitter."

The haftarah ends on an encouraging note, assuring the people that if they return to G-d with sincerity, they will be restored to their full glory.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Danger of Suspicion by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l (5763)
<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/matot/the-danger-of-suspicion/>

It is a fascinating story, and from it comes one of the great principles of Judaism. Two of the tribes, Reuben and Gad, see that the land east of the Jordan is ideally suited as pasture for their large herds and flocks of livestock. They approach Moses and ask for permission to settle there, rather than crossing the Jordan. Moses is initially furious at their request. It is, he says, bound to demoralise the rest of the people ("Shall your fellow countrymen go to war while you sit here?"). Had they learned nothing from the sin of the spies who, by de-motivating others through their behaviour, condemned an entire generation to forty years of wandering in the desert?

The Reubenites and Gadites take the point. They explain that they have no wish to exempt themselves from the struggles of their fellow Israelites. They are fully prepared to accompany them into the Promised Land and fight alongside them. "We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance." Moses makes them take a public pledge to this effect and grants their request on condition that they fulfil their word. "When the land is then conquered before God you may then return, free of any obligation before God and Israel and this land will be yours as your permanent property before God."

The italicised phrase - literally *you will be innocent before God and Israel* - became in the course of time an ethical axiom of Judaism. It is not enough to do what is right in the eyes of God. One must also act in such a way as to be seen to have done right in the eyes of one's fellow man. One must be above suspicion. That is the rule of *veheyitem neki'im*, "You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel."

How did this translate itself into Jewish law and life? The Mishnah in Shekalim speaks of the three periods in the year when appropriations were made from the collective donations stored in the Temple treasury. The Mishnah states that "The person who made the appropriation did not enter the chamber wearing a bordered cloak or shoes or tefillin or an amulet, so that if he subsequently became poor, people would not say that he became poor because he committed an offence in the chamber, and so that if he became rich people would not say that he did so by misappropriating contributions in the chamber - for we must be free of blame in the eyes of people just as we must be free of blame before God, as it is said, 'You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel.'"

Similarly the Tosefta states: "When one went in to take up the offering of the chamber, they would search him when he went in and when he came out, and they continue chatting with him from the time he goes in until the time he comes out."

Not only must there be no wrongdoing when coins are taken from the Temple treasury; there must be no suspicion of wrongdoing. Hence the person who gathered the money should not wear any item of clothing in which coins could be hidden. He was to be searched before and afterwards, and even engaged in conversation so that he would not be tempted to secrete some of the money in his mouth.

Two rabbinic teachings from the Second Temple period speak of families famous for their role in Temple life and the lengths they went to place themselves beyond suspicion. The Garmu family were expert in preparing the showbread. It was said of them that “their memory was held in high esteem because fine bread was never found in their children’s homes, in case people might say, they feed from the preparation of the showbread.” Likewise the Avtinas family were skilled in making the incense used in the Temple. They too were held in high regard because “Never did a bride of their family go forth perfumed, and when they married a woman from elsewhere, they stipulated that she was not to go out perfumed, in case people should say, They perfume themselves from the preparation of the Temple incense.”

The general principle is stated in the Talmud Yerushalmi:

R. Samuel bar Nachman said in the name of Rabbi Jonathan: In the Mosaic books, the Prophets and the Writings, we find that a person must discharge his obligations before men just as he must discharge them before God. Where in the Mosaic books? In the verse, ‘You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel.’ Where in the prophets? In ‘God, the Lord God, He knows and Israel too shall know.’ Where in the Writings? In the verse, ‘You shall find grace and good favour in the eyes of God and men.’ Gamliel Zoga asked R. Yose bar Avun, Which verse says it most clearly? He replied, ‘You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel.’”

This concern became the basis of two halachic principles. The first is known as chashad, “suspicion”, namely that certain acts, permitted in themselves, are forbidden on the grounds that performing them may lead others to suspect one of doing something forbidden. Thus, for example, R. Shimon bar

Yochai held that one of the reasons why the Torah prescribes that peah [the corner of the field left unharvested for the poor] should be left at the end of harvesting was because of suspicion. If the owner of the field had set aside an unharvested corner at the beginning or middle, the poor would come and take what is theirs before the end of harvesting, and a passer-by might think that no corner had been set aside at all. Likewise the rabbis ordained that if a house has two doors on different sides, Chanukah candles should be lit at both so that a passer-by, seeing one door but not the other, should not think that the owner of the house had failed to fulfil the command.

A closely related halachic principle is the idea known as *marit ha-ayin*, “appearances”. Thus for example, before milk substitutes became common, it was forbidden to drink milk-like liquids (made, for example, from almonds) together with meat on the grounds that people might think it was milk itself. Similarly it is forbidden on Shabbat to hang out garments that had become wet (for example, by falling into water) to dry, in case people think that one has washed them on Shabbat. In general one is not allowed to perform actions which, permitted in themselves, lend themselves to misinterpretation.

The connection or contrast between these two principles is a matter of some debate in rabbinic literature. There are those who see *chashad* and *marit ha-ayin* as very similar, perhaps even two names for the same thing. Others however see them as different, even opposites. *Chashad* represents the possibility that people might think you have done something forbidden and thus think badly of you. *Marit ha-ayin* concerns cases where people, knowing that you are not the sort of person to do something forbidden, draw the mistaken conclusion that because you are doing X, Y is permitted,

because X is easily mistaken for Y. Thus, to take one of the cases mentioned above, people seeing you hanging out clothes to dry on Shabbat might conclude that doing laundry is permitted, which it is not.

This concern for appearances is, on the face of it, strange. Surely what matters is what God thinks of us, not what people think of us. The Talmud tells us of a moving encounter between the dying Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and his disciples:

They said to him: Master, bless us. He said to them: May it be God's will that the fear of heaven should be as important to you as the fear of [the opinions of] human beings.

They said: Is that all?

He said: Would that you were able to attain this [level of spirituality]. You can see [how difficult it is] because when someone wants to commit a sin, he says, I hope no one will see me [thus placing his fear of human beings above the fear of God who sees all].

What is more, it is forbidden to suspect people of wrongdoing. The rabbis said, "One who suspects the innocent is [punished by being] bodily afflicted" and "One should always judge a person in the scale of merits." Why then, if the onus is on the observer not to judge harshly, should we - the observed - be charged with the duty of acting above suspicion?

The answer is that we are not allowed to rely on the fact that others will judge us charitably, even though they should. Rashi makes a sobering comment on the life of Moses:

If he left his tent early, people would say that he had had a row with his wife. If he left late, they would say, He is devising evil plots against us. Rashi's commentary on Deut. 1:12

Even Moses, who devoted his life with total selflessness to the people of Israel, was not able to avoid their suspicion. R. Moses Sofer goes so far as to say that he was troubled throughout his lifetime by the challenge of the command, 'You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel,' adding that it was far easier to fulfil the first half of the command than the second ('in the eyes of Israel'). Indeed he wondered if it was possible for anyone to fulfil it in its entirety. Perhaps, he said, this is what Ecclesiastes meant when he said, "There is not a righteous man on earth who only does what is right and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Yet there is a profound idea embedded in the concept of *veheyitem neki'im*, 'You shall be innocent.' The Talmudic sage Rava was scathing of those who stood in the presence of a Torah scroll but not in the presence of a Torah sage. To be a Jew is to be summoned to become a living Sefer Torah. People learn how to behave not only from the books they study but also - perhaps more so - from the people they meet. Jewish educators speak of 'text-people' as well as 'text-books,' meaning that we need living role models as well as formal instruction. For that reason, Rabbi Akiva used to follow Rabbi Yehoshua to see how he conducted himself in private, saying 'This too is part of Torah, and I need to learn.' The twin principles of *chashad* and *marit ha-ayin* mean that we should act in such a way as to be held as a role-model (by being above suspicion - the rule of *chashad*) and that, just as a book of instructions should be unambiguous, so should our conduct (by not laying itself open to misinterpretation - the idea of *marit ha-ayin*). People should be able to observe the way we behave and learn from us how a Jew should live.

The fact that these rules apply to every Jew, not just to great Sages, is eloquent testimony to the spiritual egalitarianism of

the halachah. Each of us is bidden to become a role-model. The fact, too, that these rules exist despite the fact that we are commanded not to suspect others of wrongdoing, tells us something else about Judaism, namely that it is a system of duties, not just of rights. We are not allowed to say, when we have acted in a way conducive to suspicion, 'I have done nothing wrong; to the contrary, the other person, by harbouring doubts about me, is in the wrong.' To be sure, he is. But that does not relieve us of the responsibility to conduct our lives in a way that is above suspicion. Each of us must play our part in constructing a society of mutual respect.

This brings us back to where we began with the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad to settle the land east of the Jordan. Moses, we recall, granted their request on condition that they first joined the other tribes in their battles. They did so. Years later, Joshua summoned them and told them that they had fulfilled their promise and were now entitled to return to the place where they had built their homes (Joshua 22).

However, by a profound historical irony, suspicion was aroused again, this time for a quite different reason, namely that they had built an altar in their territory. The other tribes suspected that they were breaking faith with the God of Israel by constructing their own place of worship. Israel was on the brink of civil war. The suspicion was unfounded. The Reubenites and Gadites explained that the altar they had built was not intended to be a place of worship, but rather a sign that they too were part of the Israelite nation - a safeguard against the possibility that one day, generations later, the tribes living in Israel proper (west of the Jordan) would declare the Reubenites and Gadites to be foreigners since they lived on the other side of the river:

That is why we said, 'Let us get ready and build an altar - but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices. On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the Lord at the Sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, "You have no share in the Lord." And we said, "If they ever say this to us or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the Lord's altar which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.'

Civil war was averted, but only just.

Suspicion is a pervasive feature of social life and it is intensely destructive. Judaism - a central project of which is the construction of a gracious society built on justice, compassion, mutual responsibility and trust - confronts the problem from both directions. On the one hand it commands us not to harbour suspicions but to judge people generously, giving them the benefit of the doubt. On the other, it bids each of us to act in a way that is above suspicion, keeping [as the rabbis put it] "far from unseemly conduct, from whatever resembles it, and from what may merely appear to resemble it."

Being innocent before God is one thing; being innocent before one's fellow human beings is another, and far more difficult. Yet that is the challenge - not because we seek their approval (that is what is known as pandering) but because we are summoned to be role-models, exemplars, living embodiments of Torah, and because we are called on to be a unifying, not a divisive, presence in Jewish life. As the Chatam Sofer said, we will not always succeed. Despite our best endeavours, others may still accuse us (as they accused Moses) of things of which we are utterly innocent. Yet we must do our best by

being charitable in our judgement of others and scrupulous in the way we conduct ourselves.

Matot-Masei: The Messy Journey Is Torah

by Rabbi Jonah Winer

https://truah.org/resources/jonah-winer-matot-masei-moraltorah_2026_/

Parshat Matot-Masei begins with what at first appears to be a cryptic list of the places where the Israelites camped during their 40-year journey through the wilderness, as one generation gave way to the next before entering Eretz Yisrael.

Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, the Ohr HaChaim (18th-century Morocco), notes the somewhat unusual and repetitive language that introduces this itinerary. He explains that the Torah is revealing something unexpected: Moses did not compile this list all at once at the end of the journey. Rather, he recorded each stage as it happened. When God first instructed the Israelites to depart from Egypt, Moses began keeping a written record. He noted the departure from Raamses, then, when the people encamped at Sukkot, he recorded that stop, and so on throughout the wilderness. Only when the Israelites reached Arvot Moav, poised to enter Eretz Yisrael, did God instruct Moses to incorporate these personal notes into the Torah itself.

In the Ohr HaChaim's reading, Moses had been keeping a diary ever since the Exodus — a deeply human chronicle of the twists and turns, triumphs and setbacks, of a people undergoing profound generational and spiritual transformation. Standing at the border of the Promised Land, God declares that this personal record belongs within the eternal text of

Torah. The messy, contingent experience of history is revealed to have been Torah all along.

We, too, are living through a period of profound change and disruption. In an era of rising — and, God willing, soon falling — authoritarianism, Jewish and non-Jewish publications alike are filled with debates over the boundaries of Jewishness, Zionism, and liberalism. Our communal institutions devote enormous energy to questions of what Jewish ideas are acceptable and who belongs in our synagogues, rabbinical schools, and even the halls of Congress.

The Ohr HaChaim's reading invites us to see this complex and sometimes painful journey as Torah as well. Every step on this winding path, every apparent setback, may someday be understood as part of a larger process of spiritual transformation. That does not diminish the pain of the present. At times, our communal struggles descend into exclusion, disrespect, and cruelty. Yet it is precisely in those moments that I return to a remarkable teaching by Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (19th-century Poland).

Writing on Parshat Matot, which falls during the Three Weeks — the period of mourning and reflection leading to Tisha B'Av — Rav Tzadok teaches:

Precisely within these days (the Three Weeks), in the midst of concealment, the deepest work takes place. We see that it was specifically after the destruction of the Temple that the Oral Torah began to spread and flourish through the Tannaim and Amoraim who arose afterward. Likewise, the Midrash teaches that the essential revelation of the Oral Torah comes precisely through suffering and affliction. Of this it is said: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:1)rbal confession has a double power.

Acknowledging our faults aloud affirms that we stand transparently before Hashem. At the same time, confession becomes a practice of spiritual formation, habituating us toward greater honesty and responsibility.

It was the shattering of the Temple that created the conditions for the flowering of Judaism's greatest treasure: the Oral Torah. Only through an experience of disintegration and ferment did something new and beautiful become possible. Our tradition insists that moments of moral and spiritual darkness can become the soil from which extraordinary light emerges.

May we one day be blessed to look back from the Divine perspective and recognize that each step of this journey — even the ones that seemed like missteps — was Torah all along. *(Rabbi Jonah Winer (he/him) is T'ruah's director of learning. He was born and raised in Toronto and, after earning a BA in Religious Studies at McGill University, was ordained by Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in New York. While there, he worked as a Rabbinic Intern at NYU's Bronfman Center and the Kehillah of Riverdale. After ordination, he spent three years working at Hillels, most recently as Senior Jewish Educator and Orthodox Rabbi at Brown RISD Hillel.)*

Matot-Masei: Kissed by the Divine
by Rabba Dr. Yedida Eisenstat

<https://yeshivatmaharat.org/matot-masei-kissed-by-the-divine/>

Tucked into Parshat Masei, after the recounting of the many places to which the Israelites traveled in their forty-year sojourn, in Numbers 33:38, the Torah offers a new detail about Aaron's death not included in the earlier narrative in Numbers 20. Here, the Torah tells us that Aaron died at God's word—"al pi Hashem"—a phrase the Torah only uses twice to describe

death, here and in recording Moses's death (Deuteronomy 34:5). In both places, Rashi glosses that the phrase indicates that they each died by a divine kiss. Interestingly, in his comment on the single verse that records Miriam's death (Numbers 20:1), which does not include the phrase "[al pi Hashem](#)," Rashi tells us that Miriam also died by a kiss from God.

What does it mean to die by "al pi Hashem?" How does Rashi know that this phrase refers to "a kiss"? And what is a divine kiss? The Talmud in Berakhot 8a teaches that there are 903 kinds of death, the easiest of which is a kiss, likened to pulling a strand of hair from milk. Who merits such a death? The Talmud in Bava Batra 17a teaches that there were six people over whom the angel of death had no power, including Moses and Aaron, the proof of which is the Torah's use of the phrase "al pi Hashem" in recounting their deaths. Rashi connects these two talmudic sections by explaining that Moses and Aaron died by a kiss from God.

The other four biblical characters who also were not subject to death by the angel of death were the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to whom every honor was given, which must therefore include the honor of easy death—and Miriam. The Gemara in Bava Batra does a double take: Wait. Miriam? The Torah does not say that she died "al pi Hashem!" What is she doing on this list? Rabbi Elazar answers with a verbal analogy, a *gezera shavah*: We know that Miriam also died "al pi Hashem" because of the Torah's otherwise-extraneous "there" (*sham*) in Numbers 20:1, the very brief report of Miriam's death, and the same word as it appears in the report of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34:5. And why does the Torah not say that she died "al pi Hashem?" Because it would be inappropriate to say that God kissed a woman.

Nevertheless, the rabbis provide a textual proof to support their claim that Miriam the prophetess, the sole female leader of the Jewish people alongside her brothers, merited the most honorable, most rare, and easiest death the rabbis could imagine.

Rashi transmits the rabbinic claim that Miriam died by a divine kiss in his Torah commentary, and includes the talmudic note that the Torah does not make this explicit because it would not be respectful to God. He notes that the Torah does say “al pi Hashem” regarding Aaron’s death, referring to the phrase in Parshat Masei. But in his first comment on Miriam’s death, echoing the Talmud in Moed Katan 28a, Rashi asks why her death is juxtaposed to the mitzvah of the red heifer, the means of purification from corpse impurity. He answers that just as sacrifices (like the red heifer) offer atonement, so too the deaths of the righteous offer atonement. Putting aside the complexity of the idea that the deaths of the righteous offer atonement, how does Rashi know that Miriam was righteous?

Scattered throughout rabbinic literature, in the rabbis’ interpretations of the verses that mentioned Miriam, the rabbis offered at least a few ways of establishing that Miriam was a tzadika, a righteous woman. A third-century midrash, the Mekhilta, at the very end of its commentary on the Song at the Sea on Exodus 15:20, explains that the women, led by Miriam, had such faith that God would work miracles for them that they readied their timbrels and drums before they left Egypt to accompany their songs of praise and thanks. Earlier in its commentary on the same verse, the Mekhilta accounts for why Miriam is called the “sister of Aaron.” It explains that she was a prophetess even before Moses was born, foretelling that her parents would have another son who would redeem Israel, and watching over him—continuing to prophesy—

ensuring his safety and facilitating his adoption into Pharaoh's house.

Even though the Torah does not record that the people mourned Miriam's loss, there is yet another way to know that the people felt her loss—in their thirst. Immediately upon her death, near the end of the forty-year sojourn, the people clamor for water. From the juxtaposition of Miriam's death and the people's demands for water, the Talmud in Taanit 9a teaches that it was in Miriam's merit that God provided the well that traveled with the people through the desert. In other words, Miriam was essential to sustaining the nation both spiritually and physically: spiritually—by modeling her faith in God's promise to deliver them to the promised land, and physically—because water was provided in her merit. In other words, the fatal leadership error that results in God's decision that Moses and Aaron will not lead the Israelites into the land is the direct result of her loss. Were it not for the loss of her merit, co-leadership, and faith in God's promise, it is easy to imagine that Moses and Aaron would never have disobeyed God's word in striking the rock in the wake of her death.

It is undeniable that the Torah grants far more credit and recognition to Moses and Aaron's leadership. However, through their interpretations of the Torah's mentions of Miriam's initiative, the rabbis recognize her role as a leader of the Jewish people shoulder-to-shoulder with her brothers, both during their lives, and in all their very best deaths by a divine kiss. *(Rabba Dr. Yedida Eisenstat holds a Ph.D. in medieval Jewish biblical interpretation from the Jewish Theological Seminary and semikha from Yeshivat Maharat)*

The Whole Journey by Abigail Uhrman
<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-whole-journey/>

School has ended, and with it comes a familiar flood of feelings. As my own children close out another year, I feel grateful and a little sad, eager for the summer and already nostalgic for the days that just were. My family lives in Israel, where this year those feelings have been especially layered. Transitions press us up against the fullness of what has been, even as they pull us toward what is coming.

This is exactly where B'nei Yisrael finds themselves at the opening of Mattot-Masei. With forty years of wandering behind them and the land of Canaan visible across the Jordan, they stand at a great threshold. And it is at precisely this moment that the Torah pauses, looks backward, and does something unexpected:

“Moses recorded the starting points of their various marches as directed by GOD. Their marches, by starting points, were as follows.” (Num. 33:2)

What follows is a dense list of forty-two encampments, most appearing nowhere else in the Torah and attached to no narrative whatsoever. “There is nothing in the Torah that seems to be as superfluous as the recording of these marches,” writes the 15th-century Spanish commentator Rabbi Abraham Saba, capturing a discomfort that ripples through generations of interpreters.

To make sense of this itinerary, classical commentaries like Rashi, Maimonides, and Sforno search for a macro-theological purpose, reading it as proof of divine providence, kindness, or historical loyalty. Yet these interpretations all share a collective vantage point. What none of them quite asks is what this exercise actually meant for the individual doing the writing.

The text emphasizes that Moses wrote it down, *al pi Hashem*, at God’s explicit instruction. This is an intimate act: Moses,

sitting with the full weight of forty years, commanded to go back through every stop and departure, not to extract an overarching lesson, but simply to name them, one by one, from the very beginning.

This is a masterful pedagogical move on God's part. John Dewey famously argued that [“we do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience.”](#) True reflection requires a willingness to sit with what happened before moving on to what comes next.

And Moses, in doing this, does not produce a highlight reel. Read the text closely and notice what actually interrupts the otherwise steady rhythm of *vayisu* and *vayahanu* (they set out and they encamped). The pattern only breaks for moments of vulnerability: the Egyptians burying their firstborn; Rephidim, where they ran out of water and failed in faith; the painful specificity of Aaron's death; and the looming threat of the Canaanite king of Arad.

These are not glorious inclusions. Strikingly, Sinai gets the same flat line as a dozen forgotten stops. The list only slows down for grief, fear, doubt, and loss. Everything else, including revelation itself, gets folded into the steady rhythm of the march.

The natural human instinct, standing at a moment of arrival, is to curate and tell a clean story that moves seamlessly from struggle to triumph, quietly omitting the embarrassing or mundane stops. We do this instinctively at graduations and end-of-year celebrations, selecting for key moments and presenting a version of the journey edited for the occasion.

But Moses is commanded to preserve the whole journey. Furthermore, he does not get the chance to use his reflection to fuel future performance. Unlike in Dewey's model, where

we look back in order to do better next time, there is no next chapter for Moses. He knows he will not cross the Jordan. Yet God commands the writing anyway, teaching us that honest reflection has value independent of utility. Bearing witness to the fullness of a journey is an act of integrity and a way of saying, before moving on: all of this was real. I was here for all of it.

This is what I find myself wanting to offer my own children at the end of this complicated, layered year, and what we are called to offer the students and children in our care more broadly. Not a curated version of who they were, but the honest acknowledgment that we saw them through the whole of it: the hard stops, the boring ones, the painful ones, and the glorious ones together, without ranking them or editing them into a tidier story than the one that actually happened. To do that is to tell them something a graduation speech rarely does: that they are seen and loved not only at their best, but across the full, complicated, bumpy length of the road. *(Abigail Uhrman is Director of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education and Associate Professor of Jewish Education at JTS)*