

## Parashah Masei

The one that recounts the story of the Israelites' journey with their leader, Moses, who guided them with unwavering determination and divine inspiration.

**The story starts with an account of how the Israelites** - descendants of Abraham & Sarah, Isaac & Rebekah, and Jacob & Rachel and Leah - **had long suffered as slaves in Egypt**. Their deliverance came through the leadership of Moses and his brother Aaron, who confronted the powerful Pharaoh and led their people out of Egypt.

**Their journey through the wilderness was marked by numerous challenges**. The Israelites endured scorching heat, relentless sandstorms, and vast stretches of barren terrain. Water was a constant concern, and whenever they discovered an oasis, it became a cherished place for rest and rejuvenation.

**Miriam, Moses' sister, played a vital role in their journey**. She led the people in songs of praise at these oases, helping them to maintain their faith and resolve despite the harsh conditions. Our ancestors believed even back then that music is a powerful tool.

**The Israelites established camps at various points along their journey**. Each camp had a name and held significance, serving as markers of their progress and the challenges they had overcome. Places like Marah and Elim were etched into their collective memory.

**Guided by a divine cloud that hovered over the Tabernacle by day and a pillar of fire that illuminated their path at night, the Israelites maintained a strict order of travel**. This divine guidance was a source of reassurance and direction.

**As they journeyed, they encountered neighboring tribes and nations**. Some welcomed them with open arms, offering assistance and provisions. Others, like the Amalekites, posed threats and necessitated battles. The Israelites honed their diplomatic skills, forming alliances and negotiating with the many nations they encountered. One significant event in Parashah Masei was the establishment of cities of refuge. These cities, including Kedesh, Shechem, and Hebron, provided a safe haven for individuals who had unintentionally caused harm. This demonstrated the Israelites' commitment to justice and compassion, even in the challenging wilderness. It also provided the understanding that there is a difference between intentional and unintentional deeds.

**After years of wandering and growth, the Israelites finally reached the border of the Promised Land**. Moses, who had aged gracefully during the journey, ascended Mount Nebo to gaze upon the land he would not enter, due to an earlier transgression. It was a bittersweet moment, symbolizing the end of an era and the beginning of a new chapter for his people.

**The Parashah Masei serves as a testament to the strength of the human spirit, the power of faith, and the ability to overcome adversity**. The journey through the wilderness was not just a physical one; it was also a journey of self-discovery and transformation, preparing the Israelites for the challenges and triumphs that awaited them in their Promised Land.

## Teen Takeaways from Parashah Masei

1. **Never give up:** The Israelites' long journey in the wilderness reminds us to persevere through tough times. Life can be challenging, but remember that with determination, you can overcome obstacles. What does it mean when people say that some things are worth waiting for?
2. **Reflect on your journey:** Just like the Israelites kept a record of their travels, it's essential to reflect on your experiences. This helps you learn from your past and make better choices in the future. Do you journal or have a diary?
3. **Do what's right:** The parashah emphasizes following rules and instructions from a higher power. In your life, doing what's right, whether it's following rules or being a good person, is essential.
4. **Fairness and sharing:** When dividing land among the tribes, fairness was crucial. It's a reminder to treat others justly and share resources. Be fair to your friends and peers. Knowing what your friend likes helps you become better friends. Knowing what hurts your friend is also extremely important in developing trust and caring.
5. **Mistakes happen:** Cities of refuge were created for those who made accidental mistakes. Remember that everyone makes mistakes. Show kindness and forgiveness to others when they slip up. There is a difference between intentional and unintentional acts. If they both result in the same thing, should the punishments be the same?
6. **Respect boundaries:** Just as tribes had their territories, respect personal boundaries and property. It's a way to show consideration for others and their space. Do you like the privacy of being in your room, knowing nobody will come in without permission or enter when you are not there? Do you have a sign on your door, or do you operate with trust?
7. **Unity in diversity:** The tribes were different but united as a nation. Embrace diversity in your friendships and communities. You can achieve great things when people with different backgrounds work together. How is your best friend similar to you, and how are they different? Would your friendship be better or worse if you were more or less like each other?
8. **Leave a positive Legacy:** Think about the legacy you want to leave behind. What impact do you want to have on your friends, family, and the world? Make choices that lead to a positive legacy. Do you have relatives that you knew during your lifetime who have died? What do people say about them?
9. **Learn from the past:** Remembering history helps you avoid repeating mistakes. Whether it's personal or societal history, learning from the past is valuable for making better decisions. Philosopher George Santayana once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Those words (or a slight variation) are written on the entrance to more than one Holocaust museum.
10. **Have faith and trust:** Like the Israelites trusted in God during their journey, trust in yourself and your abilities. Have faith that you can navigate the challenges life throws your way. Your b'nai mitzvah will prove it to you.

## Summary

These lessons from **Parashah Masei** can guide you in your teenage years **as you grow, make choices, and develop your character**. They apply to **school, friendships, family, and your personal development**.