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A Diary of Life

“These are the journeys of the Children of Israel. Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the command of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth.” (Bamidbar 33:1-2)

Parshat Masai begins with a review of the 42 encampments that Israel made in their 40 year journey through the Wilderness. Rashi notes that this is an illustration of the kindness of Hashem that, although it would seem that they were constantly on the move, never had any rest, this is not the case. Except for the first year when there were 14 encampments and the 40th year when there were 8, in the intervening 38 years, there were only 20 stops, including one stop at Kadesh which lasted for 19 years. See Rashi to Devarim 1:46.

The Or Hachaim says that Hashem told Moshe that beginning with the Exodus from Egypt, he was to keep a written record of all encampments as they occurred. These notations accumulated until Israel reached the 42nd stop, the Plains of Moav, where Moshe organized the list into the 48 verses that now follow. Included in this list are the incidences that took place at some of these encampments where the people

saw the Hand of Hashem which took care of their every need and desire.

From this remark of the Or Hachaim that Moshe kept a diary of the four decades spent in the Wilderness, Rav Pam explains that we can extrapolate the practical insight for life.

Every person is a recipient of Hashem’s kindness many different ways. There are periods of great joy and accomplishments, and there are periods of travail and worry which are often resolved through the hidden Hand of Hashem. This happens to each person as an individual and to a family or a community as a group. Unfortunately, with the passage of time many of these illustrations of the Kindness of Hashem are only vaguely remembered, or even totally forgotten.

One way of fulfilling the command of “Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation” (Devarim 32:7), is to follow the lead of Moshe and record as they happen “one’s own encampments” in the journey through life.

Like the verses mentioned here in Parshat Masai, they will become a permanent written record of the goodness of Hashem in one’s own life as well as that of his family and community. ■