

Parashah Mishpatim
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Shabbat Shalom.

“Moses was upon the mountain forty days and forty nights”. The number 40 - what is it? The number is even - it can be divided by 2,4,5,8,10,20 and 40 - but what does 40 essentially signify?

There are examples of the number 40 throughout daily life and the Torah. What may be considered the most well-known example in life of the number 40? The one that affects all people regardless of religion, color, race?

Pregnancy.

When a woman is pregnant she carries the baby in the womb for 40 weeks. Throughout the term of the pregnancy, many changes occur. When the egg is first fertilized, it is just one cell. Over the 40 weeks, a spinal cord, nerves, muscles, a torso, legs, and arms develop, along with all of the body's organs. Throughout the term, all aspects of the baby grow and change. By the time the baby is born, it has changed from one single cell that weighed less than an ounce to 26 billion cells and weighs 8 pounds.

At the same time as the baby is growing the woman is changing. Her body changes by adjusting to the new life within. She may have added some weight, show a baby bump, etc. She may also have emotional changes. Many women are more sensitive during their pregnancy than other times. Maybe she had other medical changes like gestational diabetes. Whatever changes a woman experiences, she will need to adjust to during this period in her life and again after the birth as her body returns to its “normal” state.

Throughout the Torah there are many examples of the number 40. One of the first is the story of Noah and the ark. Some say it shows a new beginning. G-d told Noah that he had to build an ark and get a male and female of every species and Noah's family onto the boat, because there was going to be a flood that would destroy all the living creatures and plants.

As a result of this destruction, the water would bring in a new layer of fertile soil to help rebuild civilizations and plants. This brought a new beginning to life on earth, the animals, and his family.

In this week's reading, Moses was up on the mountain for 40 days and nights. Moses went up to the mountain to collect the Ten Commandments. It took him 40 days and nights to receive them. When Moses first started to go up the mountain the whole camp sat at the base waiting for something to happen. Everybody stopped what they were doing and sat waiting for thunder to clap or Moses to come down. Yet they also grew nervous awaiting his return. So much so that they built the Golden Calf. There was nervousness of a new beginning, and change.

When Moses took the Israelites out of Egypt, they wandered the desert for 40 years. What was so special about that? We know that it doesn't take 40 years to travel from Egypt to the Promised Land. At best, 40 weeks, if they took lots of breaks. The journey was long because those that came out of Egypt were shown not to be able to change and God felt that a generation that could accept change was needed, both to accept his teachings and to accept a new way of life. One cannot change if they are not open to it.

A last example of 40 in the Torah is not so easily seen. Moses lived to the age of 120. Now if we do the very basic common core math of 120 divided by 3, we once again find the number 40. What really makes it interesting is that while Moses was alive he went through several changes. When he was 80, Moses encountered the burning bush and G-d told him that he needed to go see Pharaoh and tell

him to let his people go. He was now a leader. When Moses died at the age of 120 he had completed his life's work.

Aish.com says that "the number 40 represents transition or change; the concept of renewal; a new beginning. The number 40 has the power to lift a spiritual state."¹ Renewal is when you take a pause or time out in something and pick it up later. A new beginning is when you want to start over or have a fresh start. Transition and change can be from rules, people of power, or a new way of living.

This can be related to Moses' life as with each stage there was change whether it was being a messenger for G-d, a prince, or a leader for the Jewish people.

Other examples of 40 being an important number in Judaism are in Talmud, Avot 5:26, which says that at the age of 40 a person transitions from one level of wisdom to another. Moses the man who died at the age of 120, can then be called one of the wisest men in the world. By the time he died, he would have transitioned to a new level of wisdom three times. Moses was wise because he knew how to lead the Jewish people through the wilderness. I noticed this in my own life when my dad turned 40. He did become a little wiser. He taught me how to use a screw driver and how to write a proper paper for school. He taught me his knowledge on writing, speaking, and proper handy work.

The idea of change is seen throughout the different examples I have noted. The question then becomes what is change and is it a good or bad thing to have in your life.

A clear example of a bad change is when a loved one passes. In this case we don't have to like it but we have to accept it. I definitely didn't like it but I have learned to live with the loss of my mother.

With other negative changes, they may occur but then we can work to overcome that change and reverse it. One possible example is when one loses the use of an arm or leg. They definitely didn't want it to happen but they learn how to overcome it with the use of an artificial limb.

Other changes are clearly good ones. Like when we moved into our house just a year ago. We loved living where we were, but a different house was needed. With a lot of work to make the change happen, we found one that made our lives better. Other examples may be finding out you passed a test, getting accepted to your number 1 college choice, finding out that you or your wife is pregnant. While these changes affect the way we live our lives they are easier to accept because they can be beneficial or positive.

There is still one other type of change, or should I say non-change. Keeping things the way they are. We do this because it is comfortable, known to us and easy. We do it because making the change may be hard. As my Dad and I were discussing and reviewing my Drash, he told me about how the employees at the companies he works with don't always like changing the systems that they are used to. His response to them is "no one likes change. If we did, then I would have lost 30 pounds and quit smoking years ago." His point being that things need to change but we prefer to leave them alone.

After looking at the different examples of 40 and seeing that with each one, some change occurred, one may say that 40 represents change. One last way for me to show that is that one of the Hebrew translations of change is Haficha. The numeric equivalent for Haficha is 120 and as I already stated that is the age of Moses when he died, and more to the point a multiple of 40. This is a clear example of change and 40.

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¹ http://www.aish.com/atr/The_Number_40.html